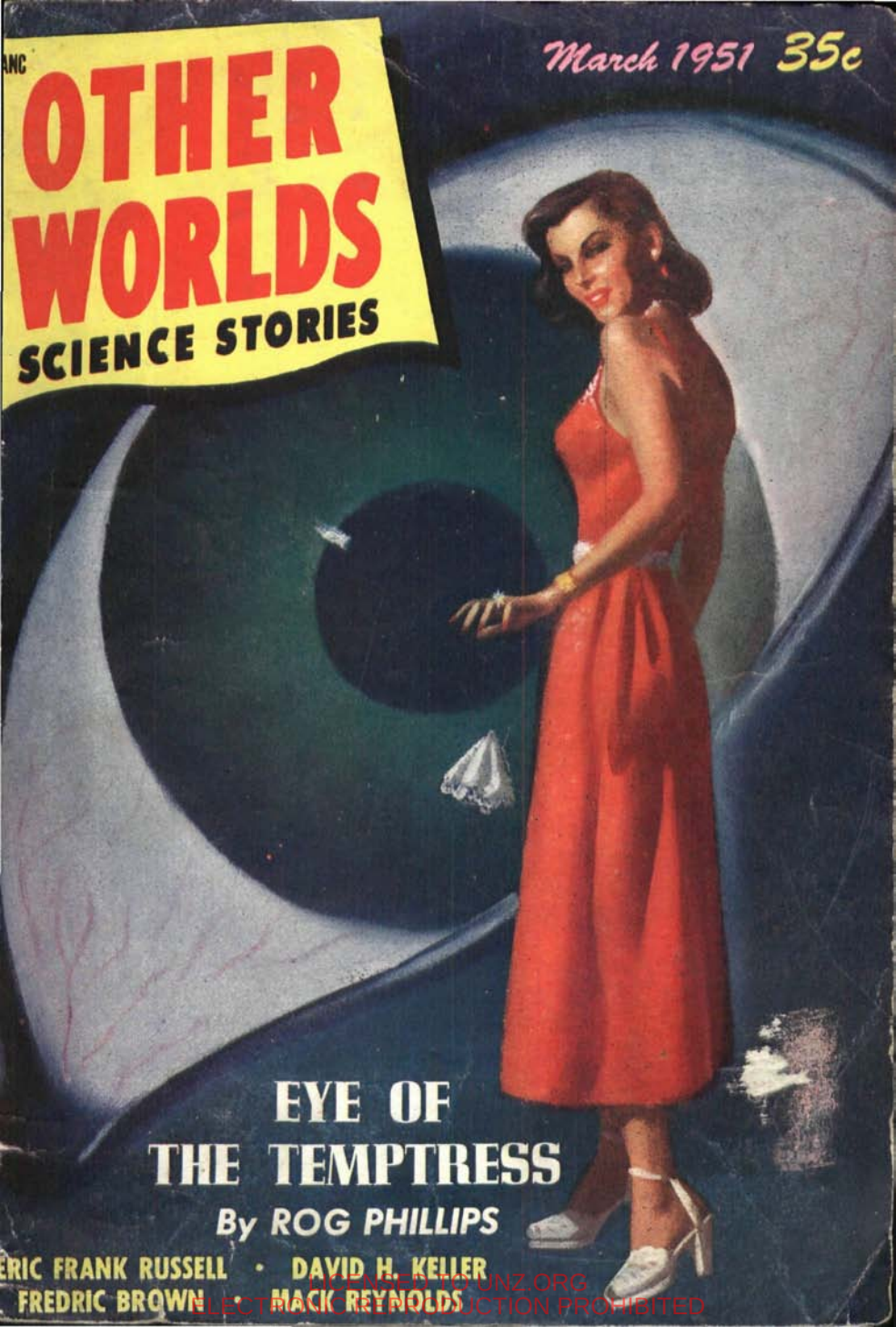
March 1951 35c

OTHER WORLDS
SCIENCE STORIES



EYE OF THE TEMPTRESS

By ROG PHILLIPS

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL • DAVID H. KELLER
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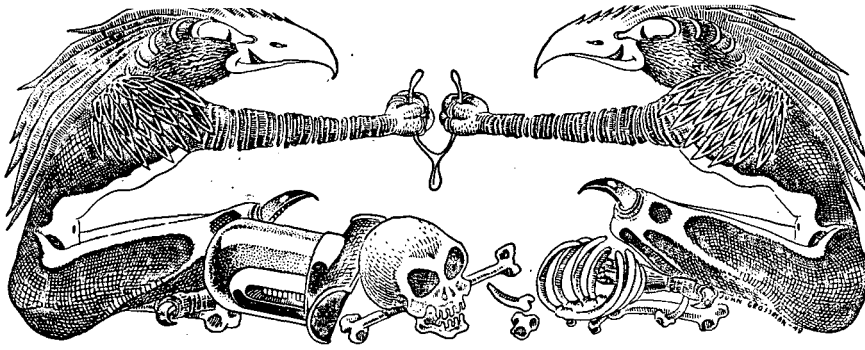

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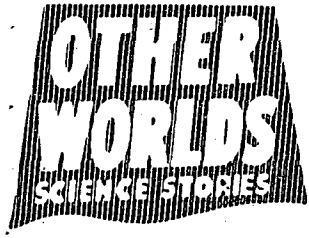

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EDITORIAL

EDITOR Gold in his third issue of *Galaxy* says he doesn't believe in editorials in fiction magazines. He expresses surprise that anyone at all would request it of him as a feature of his magazine. He asks (after saying he has only used editorials at first as a means of "set ting policy") what should he write about? Should he use dry excerpts from science news, talk about the stories, or what? What *is* there to write about, he wonders?

There we have it. This old earth is in sore trouble today—going inexorably toward chaos, toward a third and most vicious world war. We are turning brother against brother. We are displaying the rottentest character man has ever evidenced: no matter whether we look back on all known civilization; or picture in fantasy unknown and forgotten civilized eras; or imagine in science fiction the advanced races of tomorrow. And why? Because we can't come out and talk! Because we CAN'T THINK of anything to say!

What is there to say? Plenty, Mr. Gold. PLENTY. And the most LOGICAL place of all to say it is in a magazine of *your* kind, or of *this* kind. OTHER WORLDS is a magazine *without* policy. Policy is NOT THINKING. You set a policy, and STOP thinking. What is science fiction if it is not THINKING? And what does science fiction do, if not TALK about better civilization? And you, Mr. Gold, want to WASTE the precious first few pages of your magazine on *just another story!* Your golden opportunity to say WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID, gone begging!

You can't think of anything to say? Then maybe we'll start the ball rolling and say some of the things we think there are to say.

More than twenty-five years ago a man named Hugo Gernsback wanted to say something. He wanted to say "this old world is a wonderful, strange, awe-inspiring, stupendous, scientific, golden-futured place." He wanted to say it so hundreds of thousands of people with the imagination to see *forward into tomorrow* would be able to HEAR him. Where would he say it? He thought and thought, and finally he had a brilliant idea. He tried it out in the old *Electrical Experimenter*. He ran a *Science fiction story*. He extended the meaning of the word experiment to include *research via imagination*. He is responsible today for *thousands* of the mechanical wonders that make up our present civilization. DIRECTLY responsible. Without his TALK, they would not exist in our time. They would be in a dim tomorrow only half visualized in the minds of a frustrated few.

What is there to talk about, Mr. Gold? My God, how can you afford NOT to talk!

This editor began talking for himself via his fiction, published in many science fiction magazines from that of Gernsback to the present issue of OTHER WORLDS. Later he began talking via his editorials in *Amazing Stories*. Then in *Fantastic Adventures*. He talked and talked, and he gained a reputation, deserved or not, for writing the best editorials in the

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business. Leo Margulies, of Standard Magazines (*Thrilling Wonder, Startling*, etc.) once offered him twice the salary Ziff-Davis was paying him, JUST TO TALK, just to write editorials! Today, he can point back to almost as many developments in his daily life as Gernsback. He's proud of that, but sorry for one thing, that he didn't talk as much as he wanted to. He slacked off on the job. He wrote a lot of slop when he knew better. He did what you, Mr. Gold, suggested wasn't worth talking about in editorials. He talked about latest science excerpts from the dry textbooks as they came off the press. He soon learned better. Science fiction has a mission—not to talk about what is, but about what *will be*. It talks ideas into the minds of the men who work in the laboratory, in the shop, with their minds and their hands.

What is there to talk about, Mr. Gold?

Why not talk about Man's Tomorrow? Why not use your brilliant imagination to prod your authors and your readers into thinking about new things? Why not add power of your readership to the potent force science fiction is to progress? Why not add *Galaxy* to the honored list of science fiction magazines who have proved the effect they have on us all? We want *Galaxy* to succeed. We have suggested that *our* readers support it, read it. We know that there is not enough TALK of our tomorrow, not enough vivid picturization of the results of the many brands of day, not enough demonstration in an thinking and action in the world toimaginative way of what *will* happen, either good or bad, if various courses are followed by today's Man.

We think that depicting the results of a third war, of a germ war, of an atomic war, of a propaganda war, of a cold war, has a great value. *Maybe* talking about it will *influence* the course of such action. We think talking about the science of tomorrow may bring about the right kind of science, politics, moral behavior in that tomorrow. And you can't say talk won't influence it; because the record of the past twenty-five years shows that it HAS.

For instance, the atom bomb was no surprise to science fiction readers. Television was a foregone conclusion with them. *Nothing* of the past decade, with all its wonders, was *not* foreseen and talked about in science fiction magazines. Today there are two clear-cut ideologies fighting for supremacy in the world. They seem to amaze and confound the politicians of both sides. But they are *old stuff* to the science fiction reader. He read about it years ago, as an inevitable result of a trend. Authors and editors talked about those trends and pictured in imagination where they would lead. Today thousands of people are working toward the real solution of the problems that have arisen because a certain amount of *understanding* of the implications was arrived at by TALKING about them.

Science fiction readers today KNOW what the result of the battle between Capitalism and Communism will be. That battle has been talked out to its inevitable basics. It is NOT a battle of systems at all, but a battle of selfish men. It is a battle of adaption of a morally insufficient humanity to a too rapid scientific and mechanical advance. Just as a

(*Concluded on page* 60)

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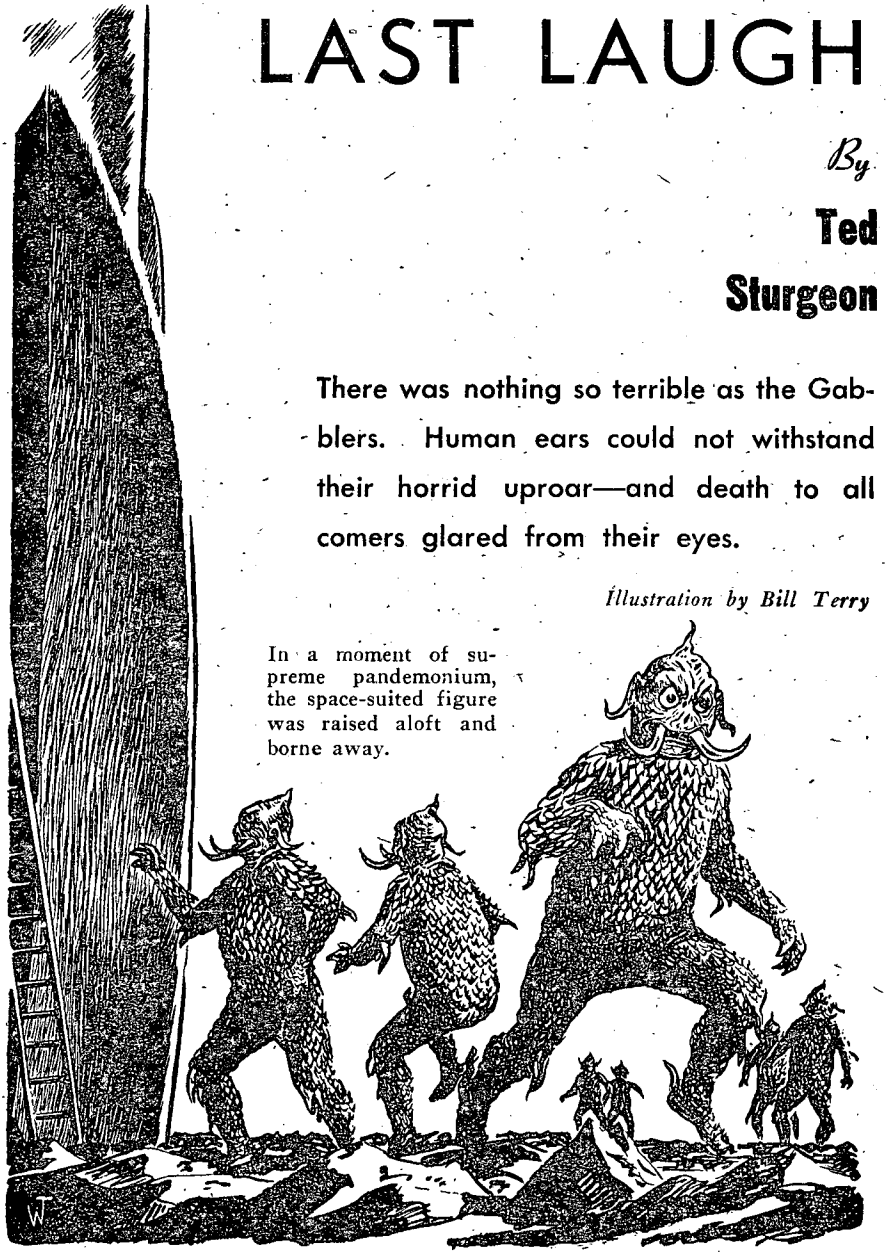
LAST LAUGH

By

Ted Sturgeon

There was nothing so terrible as the Gabblers. Human ears could not withstand their horrid uproar—and death to all comers glared from their eyes.

Illustration by Bill Terry



In a moment of supreme pandemonium, the space-suited figure was raised aloft and borne away.

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AS we approach the year 2300, the most popular parlor game seems to be picking the Man of the Century. Some favor Bael benGerson because he rewrote the World Constitution, and some hark back to Ikihara and his work on radiation sickness. More often than not, you'll hear Captain Riley Riggs nominated, and that comes pretty close to the mark.

But it misses—it misses. I'm just an old space-hound, but I know what I'm talking about. I was Communications Officer with Riggs, remember, and even if it was all of

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sixty years ago I remember it as if it was last month. The Third Venus Expedition, it was, and the trip that changed the face of the Earth. That was the space-voyage that brought back the Venus Crystals, and made you and you into the soft and happy butterflies you are today. Things were different in the old days. We knew what it was to put in a solid five-hour work day, and we had no personal robots the way everyone has today—we had to put our clothes on by ourselves in the morning. Well, it was a tougher breed then, I guess.

Anyway, my bid for the Man of the Century was on that ship, the old *Starlure*—but it wasn't Riggs.

They were a grand crew. You couldn't want a better skipper than Riggs nor a better mate than Blackie Farrel. There was Zipperlein, the engineer, a big quiet man with little eyes, and his tube 'techs, Greaves and Purci—a wilder pair of fire-eaters never hit black space. And there was Lorna Bernhard, the best navigator before or since. She was my girl, too, and she was gorgeous. There were two other women aboard—a ray analyst by the name of Betty Ordway and Honey Lundquist, the Damage Control officer. But they were strictly from blueprints and homely to boot.

And for comic relief we had this character Slopes. He was shipped because of some special training in the Venus crystal. I don't know why they bothered to put him aboard. Any development work on the crystals would have to be done on Earth when—*if*—we got back. I guess they figured there was room for him, and maybe he'd be needed to locate the crystals or something. Meanwhile, he was useless. We all thought he was and we told him about it often enough to keep him reminded.

Not that he was a nuisance to anybody. It was just that he was funny. A natural comic. I don't mean the kind who slips an anti-gravity plaque under the tablecloth and switches it on when somebody sets down the soup, and I don't mean the life-of-the-party who sticks a brace of fluorescent tubes under his collar and pretends he's a Martian. This Slopes was just automatically funny to have around. He wasn't quite big enough, see, and though he wasn't homely, he also wasn't good-looking enough to do himself any good. His voice wasn't quite deep enough or loud enough to be completely heard . . . I guess the best way to say it is to call him an Almost; a thoroughgoing Almost. And the difference between Almost and Altogether—at least in Slopes—was ver y funny to ship out with, and he had it in every department.

NONE of us knew him before he came aboard, which he did two hours before blast-off in civilian clothes. That was his first mistake, though why I should call it a

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mistake . . . after all, he was a civilian technician. Even so, all the rest of us were from one or another of the Services, and we just naturally had something on him from the start. Purci, the No. 2 Tube-man, was lounging in the alleyway when Slopes stepped off the cargo-lift with his gear, and he sized the man up right now. Purci was tall, loose-jointed, relaxed, deadpan. He took Slopes aft (down, that is, since the *Starlure* stood upright on her tail-vanes when she was aground) and showed him where to stow his gear. The locker Purci gave him happened to be the garbage port, which scavenged out automatically when we hit the ionosphere. There was no real harm in that—there was plenty of gear in the slop-chest which almost fit him, and at least he looked halfway "regulation." But he sure was funny. The look on his face when he went to that garbage port six hours out was indescribable. I have to laugh now thinking about it. And for the rest of the trip all he had to do was ask where anything was, and some one'd say, "Look in the garbage!" and the whole crew would lay back and roar.

Probably the most fun we had was at "turnover" when we stopped accelerating and went into free fall. For Slopes's benefit the artificial gravity was left off, and all hands but Zipperlein, who was at the drive controls, gathered in the wardroom to watch. Word had been passed to everyone but Slopes as to just when the gravity would cut out, and believe me, it was a tough job to keep from busting out laughing and spoiling the whole deal. We all sprawled around hard by a stanchion or a bolted-down table so we'd have something solid to grab when the time came. Slopes came in and sat by himself near the chow-chutes, innocent as a babe. Greaves sat with one hand cupping his wrist-watch and his eyes on the sweep second-hand. About three seconds short of turn-over, he barked, "Slopes! Come over here, huh?"

Slopes blinked at him. "Me?" He uncrossed his legs and got to his feet, timidly. He had taken about two steps when the drive cut off.

I guess nobody ever gets really used to turnover. Your stomach gives a delicate little heave and the semi-circular canals in your inner ear rebel violently. You tense yourself, all over, to the cramping point, and get no end confused because though you know you're falling, you don't know which way—and anyhow, your reflexes expect a swift and sudden impact (because you're falling) and there just isn't any impact, so your reflexes feel foolish. Your hair drifts out every which way, and through and through, completely separated from your intense panic, is the *damndest* feeling of exhilaration and well-being. They call it Welsbach's Euphoria. Psychological stuff. Anxiety relief

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with the gravityless state.

But I was talking about Slopes.

When Zipperlein cut the drive Slopes just went adrift. His advancing foot touched and lightly scraped the floor instead of making a good solid pace. He flung his arms backward, I guess because he thought he was falling that way, and as his shoulders checked the arm-motion, they were carried down while his feet went up. He did a slow-motion half-somersault and would have gone all the way around if his feet hadn't touched the overhead and stopped his rotation. He hung in midair with his head down and his feet up, with nothing to hang on to, and with the powerful feeling that though the blood ought to be rushing to his face, it wasn't. All of a sudden, everything around him acted like *up,* and there wasn't any *down* left anywhere. He grabbed wildly toward the bulkhead, the overhead, the door—things he knew he couldn't reach. After that he subsided, trembling, and by that time the rest of us had recovered from the weird impact of turnover —after all, we'd all felt it before— and we could enjoy the fun.

"I said 'come here!'" Greaves snapped.

Slopes sort of flailed at the air and jigged with his feet. It made no never mind — he just stayed where he was, head down and helpless. We roared. He flapped his lips a couple of times, and then said, real strained, "*Mmmph. Mmmph.*" I thought I'd die.

"Don't be so standoffish," said the Lundquist chick, the Damage Control officer. "Come on down and give us a kiss."

Slopes whispered, "Please . . . Please."

Betty Ordway said, "Make him say 'Pretty Please'." We laughed.

"Reckon maybe he don't like us," I piped up. "Come on down and join the crowd, Slopesy."

Somebody said, "Hold out some garbage," and everybody laughed again.

Zipperlein came in, hand over hand. "Looky there," he said in his big, fat, flatulent voice. "Man can fly."

"Got his head in the clouds," said the skipper. Everybody laughed again—not because it was funny— because it was the skipper.

"Please," said Slopes, "get me down. Somebody get me down."

Greaves said, "I like a shipmate that can stand on his own feet. Slopes, I asked you real polite-like to come on over and be sociable."

Zipperlein laughed. "Oh — you want him?" He went from the door to the scuttlebutt, from the wardroom table to a lighting fixture, one hairy hand after another, until he could reach Slopes' foot. "Greaves wants you," he said, and shoved.

Slopes spun end over end. He began to wail—"Ow-*oo!* Ow-*oo!*" as he turned. Spinning, he went from one end of the wardroom to

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the other toward Greaves. Greaves was ready for him, his hands firm to a banister-bar, his feet doubled up. When Slopes reached him, he planted his feet in Slope's back and booted him, spinning no longer, unship toward the Captain. Riggs gave him a shoulder, and shunted him over to me. I butted him back to Greaves. Greaves reached but missed him, and he hit the bulkhead with a crunch. Weight is one thing—you can get rid of that. Mass is something else again. Slopes's hundred and fifty-odd pounds were all with him, at high velocity, when he hit the wall. He hovered near it, whimpering.

"Zip," said the Captain, "Turn on the grav plates. This could go on all day."

"Aye," said the engineer, and swarmed out.

I'D been hanging on to Lorna, partly because I knew she'd have hold of something solid, and partly because I just liked to hang on to her. "Ace," she said to me, "whose idea was this?"

"A poor thing," I said, "but mine own."

"Ace," she told me, "you know what? You're a skunk."

"Ah, climb off," I grinned. "You should see what they did to me when I was a cadet."

She turned to look at me, and there was an expression I'd seen in her eyes only twice before. Both times she and I had been strangers. She said, "I guess you learn something new every day. Even about people you know pretty well."

"Yep," I said, "and it's a blessing. You can look at the stars just so long on these trips, and then you can watch just so many visitape recordings. After that you need something to relieve the monotony. I think we all owe Slopes a rousing vote of thanks."

She said something then but I didn't get it. Everyone was laughing too hard. Zipperlein had cut in the artificial gravity and Slopes had thumped to the floor, where he writhed, hugging it to him as if he loved it, which of course he did. Everyone does coming out of free fall.

Oh, we had a ball that evening. I'll never forget it.

THERE was a lot of chit-chat aboard about our mission. Now that we have Venus crystals by the hundreds of millions, it's not easy to tell you just how valuable they were sixty years ago. The Second Venus Expedition had picked up two of them, and both were destroyed in the tests that determined their characteristics — sort of like throwing a bottle against a wall to find out if it's brittle. The first was shattered purposely—no one knew at that time that it was different from any other crystal known—so that it could be chemically analyzed, a solution prepared, and new crystals grown. But Venus crystals

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just don't grow. The second crystal was subjected to some high-frequency resonance tests. Someone got a little too experimental with the frequencies used and the crystal blew up. Data on the explosion showed that what we had just had in our hands, but didn't have any more, was the key to broadcast power—power so plentiful that everyone could have it practically for free. The power we already had, since the techniques for fissioning copper atoms had been developed. But broadcasting it was something else again, unless a tight beam could be aimed from power plant to receiver and kept that way, even if the receiver was on an automobile or a 'copter and dodging. The Venus crystal could do that job—vibrating at just power frequencies and sending back radiations that would guide in the power beam. Get enough of those crystals, and we could do away with millions of miles of transmission wire, and convert it to enough fuel to power Earth for a couple of centuries. Don't forget, mankind has been laying a network of copper over the world for going on four hundred years, and there's lots of it.

So for a fuel-hungry Earth, these crystals were top priority. And the only thing that stood in our way—aside from getting to Venus—was the Gabblers.

The First Venus Expedition discovered the Gabblers, and left them respectfully alone. The Second Expedition discovered that the Gabblers had a stock of the precious crystals—and got chased the hell out after picking up two. It was our job to bring back a whole slew of the crystals, Gabblers or no Gabblers. Although our orders ran to a bucketful of fine detail, the essence of them was: "Treat with the Gabblers and get crystals. If the Gabblers won't play—get the crystals anyway."

"I hope we can get them peacefully," Lorna would say. "Humans have destroyed and killed enough."

And I'd tell her, "It don't matter one way or the other, kid. Gabblers aren't *people*."

"They're civilized, aren't they? Almost?"

"They're savages," I'd snort. "And monsters as well. Keep your sympathies for nice smooth hungry human beings like me."

Then she'd slap my hands away and go back to her computers.

ONCE Slopes asked me about the Gabblers. "Are they really humans?"

"Humanoids," I told him shortly. He made me a little uncomfortable to talk to, somehow. I mostly enjoyed his comedy. "They walk on two legs, and they have hands with an opposed thumb, and they wear ornaments. That's all they use the crystals for. But they breathe ammonia instead of oxygen and have Lord knows what kind of

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metabolism. Why, Slopesy? Figuring on rootin' in their garbage?"

"I was just asking," he replied gently. He put on his timid almost-smile and went aft. I remember laughing at the thought of him up against a couple of Gabblers—the most terrifying object in history since some ancient tale-teller dreamed up the Gryphon. All but two of the crew of the *Starbound*, the Expedition Two ship, had thrown down their packs and run for their lives at the very sight of a Gabbler. The other two had faced them out until the Gabblers started to scream. The psychologists had a lot to say about that noise, but it was too much for any normal human being. One of the two men broke and ran, and no shame attaches to him for that. The other was cut off from the ship, and stood paralyzed with fear while the Gabblers screamed and trumpeted and pounded the earth with their scaly fists until it shook. He fired one shot in the air — he had sense enough not to risk wounding one of the enraged creatures—to frighten them off. Perhaps it did. All he remembers is a redoubled bedlam —such a gush of furious, animal noise that he passed out cold on the spot. When he came to they'd gone. The two crystals were lying near him; he picked them up and ran blindly for the ship. It took eight months of the world's most advanced psychotherapy to straighten him out, and they say he's not quite normal yet, though he's lived to be an old man. What fantastic psychic emanations those angry creatures used as weapons was not known, but the idea of Slopes up against them really tickled me.

THE watches passed quickly enough with Slopes aboard to keep us amused. I'll never forget the night Greaves slipped a spoonful of head-mastic, the damndest adhesive that has ever been developed, into one of his sandwiches. Slopes bit into it and right then his upper teeth were welded to his lower teeth. He ran around in circles, whimpering, with half a sandwich sticking out of his face, flapping his hands uselessly. It was a riot. The stuff was quite harmless—it's chemically inert, and it yields readily to a little low-grade *beta* radiation, which breaks down the molecular cohesion. But we didn't radiate him until we were good and ready. I wish you could have seen the fun.

We forgot about him when we broke atmosphere on Venus, though I rigged the infra-red viewscreens for Lorna—they're a little cleaner than radar in ammonia fog—and she took us in neat as you please. We located the spot where the *Starbound* had landed by feeding a photo-map of the scene into the automatic pilot and matching it to the viewscreen.

Lorna threw the nose up and flipped the controls to the gyros.

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Tail-first we drifted down, sitting on a diminishing pillar of fire, while Lorna's eyes were glued to the echo-gauge which indicated the solidity of the footing under the ship. Once let one of those space-hoppers fall on its side and you could call yourself marooned. We didn't have anti-gravity drive in those days. It was real primitive stuff. All the dash and daring's gone from you young 'uns.

There's not much to tell about Venus. It was as unappetizing and useless then as it is now—except that somewhere out there were the crystals we had come for. Through the ports we could see nothing but fog. Through the radar and infra-red screens we saw rolling country, crags, pale blue vegetation and an occasional tree-like growth far larger than such things ought to be.

We had to sit tight for twelve hours or so while the ground under us cooled and the chemical mish-mash of fixed and unfixed nitrogen, nitric acid, ammonium nitrate, ozone and water stirred up by our landing worked itself out. Most of us slept. I don't think Slopes did, though. He travelled from the infra-red to the radar apparatus, fore, aft, right, left, above and below screens. He even haunted the blank, fog-ridden portholes, peering into that swirl of heat and chemical reaction, straining his eyes and his heartbeat for little glimpses of that meaningless Venusian landscape. And it was Slopes who roused us.

"Gabblers!" he jittered. "Come look! Captain Riggs! Captain Riggs!"

He was as excited as a ten-year-old, and I've got to admit it was catching. We crowded around the screens.

EMERGING from the crag-strewn undergrowth two hundred meters from the ship were moving things which, in spite of our careful indoctrination, made us gasp and turn away. They were bigger than men—I hadn't figured on that, for some reason. They were *much* bigger. As for the rest . . . I have a vision of yellow fangs, angry red eyes, and grey-green scales that is vivid enough—I'd as soon not talk much about it.

"Let's have some sound," said the skipper. I went into the communications shack and cranked up an amplifier. I switched in an exterior microphone and plugged the output into the intercom. The ship filled with the background noises of an alien planet—a hollow wind-sound, startling because the fog seemed so still; birdlike squeaks and screams, distant and different; and over it all, the repulsive chatter and back-chatter of the Gabblers—the sound that had given them their name. It was an insane sound, hoarse and seemingly uncontrolled. It ranged harshly up and down the scale, and it differed rather horribly from the obscene yammering of apes in that it seemed to

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carry consistent intelligence.

"Tubes!" barked the Captain. "Break out the suit stores and walkie gear. Sparks, stand by your shack. I want separate recordings of every suit transmitter. Navigator, tend the screens. Four volunteers here by the exit port. Jump."

Now, I don't want to run down the courage of the Space Service. It might be nice to say that everyone aboard clicked his heels and said "At your command, sire!" On the other hand, when I was telling you about the *Starbound* men who broke and ran when they saw the Gabblers, I think I made it clear that under the circumstances they carried no shame with them. Riggs asked for four volunteers; he got two: Purci, who, without dramatics, genuinely did not give a damn, and Honey Lundquist, who I suppose wanted to be noteworthy for something besides being as homely as a blue mud fence. As for me, I was glad I'd been assigned to my communications equipment and had no decision to make. As for the rest who didn't volunteer, I don't blame them. Not even Slopes, though I still thought it a fine idea for him to face up a couple of hungry Gabblers, just for the comedy of contrast.

Riggs made no comment. He just stripped and got into space harness, the other two following. The rest of us helped them pull on the skin-tight rig and clamp down the globular transparent helmets. They tested their air and their communications, and then went to the inside gate of the airlock. I opened it for them.

"We're going to make contact," said Riggs stonily. His voice came from the intercom speakers rather than directly from him. It was eerie. "We'll try to make it peaceful first. So no sidearms. I'm taking a pencil gun, just in case. You two stay close together and behind me. We'll stay hard by the ship, and under no circumstances let ourselves get cut off. Check communications."

"Check!" yelped Purci.

"Check!" whispered Honey Lundquist.

The skipper marched into the lock with the other two close behind him. I rumbled the gate shut behind them, and opened the outer lock with the remote control. All hands left aboard dove for the viewscreens.

THE Gabblers, twenty or thirty of them, stuck close to the bush. Although we could not yet see the skipper and his volunteers, it was immediately evident that they had been seen. The Gabblers came out with a rush, and a more terrifying spectacle these old eyes have not seen. In the intercom, I heard Purci say "Ugh!" and Honey say "Eeek!" The Captain said "Steady" in an unsteady voice. Behind me, there was a faint *thunk* as Betty Ordway passed out. I let her lie and went

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back to my screen.

As if by common agreement, the bulk of Gabblers halted at the crest of the gentle slope between us and the brush, and three of them came forward together, one ahead and two behind. The rest set up such a roaring that the giant trees visibly quivered. It was just about then that the skipper moved far enough out to be visible, with Honey and Purci close behind him. They stopped, and the three advancing Gabblers stopped, and, incredibly, the crowd at the top of the hill doubled its noise. I couldn't help it—I turned down the gain control on the outside mike. I couldn't stand it. Lorna thanked me. Slopes wiped his face, working the handkerchief around his eyes so he wouldn't miss anything.

There was a moment's tension—I don't mean silence; the gabbling kept up at that astounding volume, but nothing moved. When movement started, it was awfully fast.

The Captain raised both arms in what he obviously felt was a gesture of peace. Judging by what happened the Gabblers took it as a deadly insult. They went straight up in the air, all three of them, and hit the ground running. They travelled in great bounds, yowling and roaring as they came, and behind them the mass of their followers started down the slope. Over the racket I heard Honey Lundquist scream. The three space-suited figures looked very tiny down there at the approach of that wave of bellowing giants. I saw one of the three go down in a faint. Riggs yelled a futile, "Halt or I fire!" and aimed the pencil gun. One volunteer scooped up the limp form of the other, draped it across the shoulders of the space-suit, and began lumbering toward the ship. Riggs aimed, fired, turned, and ran without waiting to see what his shot had accomplished.

IT was Slopes who leaped to the lock control and pressed his nose to the vision port to make sure all three were safely inside, and then slammed the outer door. He switched on the air-replacement pump that would get rid of the ammonia gas in the lock, and dove back to the screens.

There was a cluster of Gabblers around the one Riggs had shot. The noise was fiendish. I went to the shack and turned down the volume again, but you could actually hear that racket through your feet on the deck-plates.

The inner lock gate slid open, and a very pale-faced skipper stepped out. Behind him were his volunteers—Honey Lundquist looking winded, and Purci draped over her shoulders. "He fainted," she said unnecessarily and dumped him in to our arms.

We rolled him into a corner and kept our eyes on the screens. "Anyway, I got one of them," breathed Riggs.

"No you didn't, Captain," said

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Slopes. Sure enough, the prostrate Gabbler was sitting up, weaving his massive tusked head from side to side and shrieking.

"Are they bullet-proof?" Greaves mouthed.

"No," said Slopes, devastatingly, "The skipper shot him smack on that crystal he had around his neck."

Captain Riggs groaned. "And that's about as close as we'll get to those crystals this trip," he predicted morosely. "They never told me it was going to be like this. Why in time didn't they send a battle cruiser?"

"To kill off these creatures and loot their bodies for their ornaments?" asked Lorna scornfully. "We've come a long way in the last thousand years, haven't we?"

"Now that's not the way to look at it," I began, but Riggs cut in, "You're right, you're right, Lorna. Unless we get them to cooperate, we'll spend years in finding out how they make the crystals. Or where they mine them. And we haven't got years. We've got about four more days."

See, sixty years ago a ship could fuel for just so much blasting. A trip was timed for the closest transit of the planets. To leave Venus and chase after Earth as the planets drew apart again in Space was out of the question. Now, of course, with power to throw away, it happens every day.

We got Purci out of his suit and revived him. We were all ready to swear that he'd had some secret weapon used on him. He didn't scare easily. It was probably just his particular response to that particular level of noise—a completely individual thing. But at the moment we were ready to believe anything of the Gabblers.

The ship began to tremble.

"They're attacking us!" yelped Greaves.

But they weren't. There were more than ever of them. The entire slope was covered with bulky, scaly, horribly manlike monsters. They were all gabbling away insanely, and in great numbers they'd squat down and pound on the ground with their mallet-like fists.

"Working theirselves up into a frenzy," Zipperlein diagnosed. "Skipper, let's blast off. We're what you might call underequipped for this sort of stuff."

Riggs thought. "We'll stick it out for a while," he said finally. "I'd like to feel I'd done everything I could—even if it's just sitting here until we have to leave."

I had my doubts, and from the looks of them, so had the others. But no one said anything. The ship trembled. We went and had chow.

ABOUT thirteen hours before blast-off time I was staring glumly into a screen at the swarm of Gabblers when I sensed some-

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one beside me. It was Slopes. He'd been left pretty much alone in the past three days. I guess everyone was too depressed and nervous to want fun.

"Look at 'em," I growled, waving at the screen. "I don't know whether it's the same ones or whether they've been working in relays to keep the hassle going all this time. You'd have to be a Venusian to tell one from another. I can't tell 'em apart."

He looked at me as if I'd just told him where the crown jewels were hid, and walked off without a word. He began pulling off his clothes. None of us paid any attention. If we thought anything at all, I guess we figured he was going to take a shower. Before any of us knew what was happening, he'd skinned into a spacesuit and was clamping on the helmet.

"Hey! Slopes! Where do you think you're going?"

He said something but I couldn't hear. I reached back and flipped on the intercom, which would pick up his suit radio. He repeated his remark, which was simply. "Out." He stepped into the airlock and slid the door shut.

Riggs came pounding out of the control room. "Where's that crazy fool go—" He went for the airlock, but the red light over it blazed, indicating that the chamber was now open to the outside, and Slopes was gone.

"Get on his beam," Riggs snapped, and grabbed a mike from my bench. "Slopes!" he roared.

I punched buttons. Slopes' voise came in, far more calm and clear than I had ever heard it before.

"Yes, Captain."

"Get back in here!"

"I'm going to try for those crystals."

"You're trying for some suicide. Get back here. That's an order!"

"Sorry, Captain," said Slopes laconically. Riggs and I stared at each other, amazed. Slopes said, before the Captain could splutter out another word, "I have an idea about these Gabblers, and I'm the only one qualified to carry it out."

"You'll get killed!" Riggs bellowed.

"I will if I'm wrong," said Slope's quiet voice. "Now, if it's all the same to you, I'll switch off. I have to think."

Riggs was filling his lungs when he saw Slopes's radio-response indicator wink out on the board. The breath came out in a single obscene syllable.

All hands went to the screens, in which Slopes was just visible walking away from the ship. "Qualified!" I snorted. "What the hell is *he* qualified for?"

"Humanity," said Lorna. I didn't know what she meant by that. Her face was white and strained as she watched the screen.

THE Gabblers went into a flurry of activity when they saw

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him. They crowded forward, practically stepping on one another to get at him. Three or four of the fastest raced out to him, screaming and clashing their tusks. As if to gloat in his helplessness, they circled him, leaping and yammering, occasionally dropping to drum powerfully on the ground with their fists. Then suddenly one of them picked him up, held him high over its head, and raced up the slope with him. The mob parted and closed again behind the creature, and the whole scaly crowd followed as Slopes was borne up out of sight in the blue underbrush.

"Of all the ways in the world to commit suicide," breathed Purci. Honey Lundquist began to sob.

"It isn't suicide," said Lorna. "It's murder. And you murdered him."

"Who?" I demanded. "Me?"

"Yes, you," she flared, "you and all the rest of you. That poor little tyke never hurt anyone. You did the rottenest thing that can be done to a human being—you persecuted him for what he was, and not for anything he'd done. And now he proves himself man enough—human enough — to give his life for the mission we've all failed on."

"If he went out there to get killed," said Betty Ordway with icy logic, "it's suicide, not murder. And if his going out there had anything to do with getting the crystals, I don't see it."

"I didn't see you giving him a tumble," said Honey smugly.

Lorna didn't try to fight back. "I didn't really know what he was until just now," she said ashamedly, and went to her quarters.

"We ought to go out after him," said Greaves. Everyone just let that remark lie there. Riggs said, "We blast off in eleven point three hours, whatever," and went into the chart room. The rest of us stood around trying not to look at one another, feeling, *maybe we were a little hard on the guy,* and *damn it, we never did him any harm, did we?*

It hit all of us at the same second, I think, that after three days of incessant babbling and ground-thumping, it was deadly quiet outside. Everybody started to talk, and shut up after two syllables. And I think we all began to understand then what Lorna had been driving at.

It was Purci who said it for us, softly, "He didn't want to come back into this ship. He didn't want to go back to Earth. He didn't belong anywhere, because no one ever bothered to take him in. And I guess he just naturally got tired of that."

I don't think fifty words were spoken—outside the line of duty—in the next ten hours.

IT couldn't have been more than ninety minutes before blast-off when we heard the Gabblers com-

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ing back. Heads came up one by one.

"They want another bite to eat," someone said. Someone else—one of the girls—swore abruptly.

I threw power into the screens. The underbrush was alive with Gabblers, swarming toward the ship. "Skipper!" I called, "blast off, huh? and singe the scales off'n them."

"You keep your big stupid fat mouth shut," said Lorna. It was barely a whisper, but I'll swear you could hear it all over the ship. *"They're bringing back Slopes!"*

She was right. She was so right. With his legs wrapped around the neck of a capering Gabbler, his face slightly blue because of a dwindling oxygen supply in his suit, and a wide grin. Slopes rode up to the ship, followed and surrounded by hundreds of the scaly horrors. The Gabbler he rode knelt, and Slopes climbed stiffly off. He waved his hand, and a full fifty of the creatures dropped to their haunches and began pounding the dirt with their fists. Slopes walked wearily toward the ship, and four Gabblers followed him, each carrying a bulky bundle on its head.

"Port open?" someone managed to say. I checked it. It was.

There were heavy thumps in the port, and a nerve-wrackingly close blast of Gabbler chatter. Then the red light went out and we heard the whine of the air-transfer pump.

At last the door slid open. We fell all over each other to get his helmet and suit off. "I'm hungry," he said. "And I'm awful tired. And I swear I'll be dead for life."

We rubbed him down and wrapped him up and fed him hot soup. He fell asleep before he was half finished. About then it was blast-off time. We secured him in his bunk and lashed his four big bundles down and, after a couple of short puffs to warn the Gabblers back, we reached for the stars.

IN the four bundles were eight hundred and ninety-two perfect Venus crystals. And on the return trip we tried so hard to make up to Slopes what he'd been through all his life that we actually began to be jealous of each other. And Slopes—he was no longer an Almost. He was very definitely an Altogether, with a ring to his voice, with a spring to his step.

He worked like a slave on those crystals. "They've *got* to be synthesized," was all he'd say at first. "Humanity and the Gabblers must be kept apart." So — we helped him. And bit by bit the story came out. The nearer he got to analyzing the complex lattice of those crystals, the more he'd say. So it was that before we reached Luna we found out what he'd done.

"Those Gabblers," he said, "you had them figured wrong. That's the damn thing about a human being —anything he doesn't understand,

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he fears. That's natural enough — but why does he have to assume that every emotion he causes in a strange animal means the animal is going to attack?

"Just suppose you're a small animal—say a chipmunk. You're hiding under a table eating cake-crumbs and minding your own business. There's a half-dozen humans in the room and one of them is droning on about a travelling farmer and a salesman's daughter. He reaches the punchline and everybody laughs. But what about Mr. Chipmunk? All he knows is that there's a great, explosive roar of animal sound. He all but turns himself inside out with fright.

"That's exactly what happened with human beings and the Gabblers. Only the humans were the chipmunks, for a change."

Someone exploded, "You mean those lizard-apes was *laughing* at us?"

"Listen to him," said The New Slopes. "How indignant can you get? Yes, I mean exactly that. Human beings are the funniest things the Gabblers have ever seen in their lives. When I went out to them they carried me off to their village, called in neighbors for miles around, and had themselves a ball. I couldn't do anything wrong. Wave my arm — they roared. Sit on the ground — they doubled up. Run and jump— they lay down and died."

Suddenly he shoved aside his work and spoke from down deep inside himself. "That hurts, somehow, doesn't it? Humans shouldn't be laughable. They've got to be the kings of creation, all full of dignity and power. It's inexcusable for a human being to be funny unless he tries to be. Well, let me tell you something — the Gabblers gave me something that no human being ever was able to give me—a sense of *belonging* to humanity. Because what you people went through when the Gabblers first rushed to you, laughing, is what I've been going through all my life. And it's never going to happen again. Not to me; for thanks to the Gabblers I know that all you superior joes are just as funny as I am.

"The Gabblers are gentle, grateful people. They enjoyed the show and they showered gifts on me. When I indicated that I liked crystals, they went out and got more crystals than I could carry.

"And I'm just as grateful, and that's why these crystals are going to be manufactured so cheaply on earth that there will never be another Venus Expedition for them. Don't you see? If mankind ever makes close contact with a race that laughs at them on sight—mankind will exterminate that race."

On second thought, maybe they shouldn't nominate Slopes as Man of the Century. Maybe he wouldn't like for the Gabblers to get that much publicity. And besides, he's a stinker. He married my girl.

THE END

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (39 U. S. C. 233)

Of OTHER WORLDS, published at intervals of 6 weeks at Evanston, Illinois for March, 1950.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor and business manager are:

Publisher, Clark Publishing Company ----------1144 Ashland Avenue, Evanston, Ill.
Editor, Raymond A. Palmer ---------- 2514 Grant St., Evanston, Ill.
Managing editor, Beatrice Mahaffey ---------- ---- 720 Foster St., Evanston, Ill.
Business manager, None.

2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.)

Clark Publishing Company ---------- 1144 Ashland Ave., Evanston, Ill.
Harold D. Gross ---------- ---- --- 7415 North Damen, Chicago, Ill.
Raymond A. Palmer ---------- -- 2514 Grant St., Evanston, Ill.
Marjorie Palmer ---------- ---------- 2514 Grant St., Evanston, Ill.

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. The two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such rustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

RAYMOND A. PALMER, Editor

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 15th day of September, 1950.

(SEAL)

CLIFFORD J. PETERSON
(My commission expires April 8, 1951)

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PERSONALS

The latest issue of CHALLENGE, a poetry zine edited by Lilith Lorraine, is now available. Avalon World Arts Academy, Rogers, Ark . . . The Fantasy Veterans Association is now publishing the Fan-Vet for stf fans in the Armed Forces. For details, write Ray Van Houten, 409 Market Street, Patterson 3, NJ . . . *Jack Irwin, Box 3, Tyro, Kans. has back number mags and out of print books for sale; send want list* . . . Fans interested in joining a new club contact Jan Romanoff, 26601 S. Western Apt. No. 431, Lomita, Calif. . . . *A. Charles Catania, 620 W 182 St, NY 33, NY will trade or sell WELL OF THE UNICORN, Fletcher; . GREENER THAN YOU THINK, Moore; and AWAY FROM THE HERE AND NOW, Harris. Will buy or trade for OF WORLDS BEYOND, Eschbach and any author anthology such as SIDE-WISE IN TIME, Leinster* . . . THE FANZINE EDITOR, for and by fan editors and publishers free to any fanzine editor, past or present, who sends his name to Lee D. Quinn, Box 1199 Grand Central Station, NY 17, NY . . . *THE CINVENTION MEMORY BOOK, an account of the stf convention at Cincinnati, can be obtained from Don Ford, Box 116, Sharonville, Ohio. Contains convention photos, speeches, and accounts of after-hours sessions; price* $1 . . . 2nd issue of DESTINY, a 16 page lithoed zine, now available. Write DESTINY, 545 NE San Rafael, Portland 12, Oreg; price 15c . . . *Gerald Woodley, 24 Reid Ave, Warsaw, NY has a collection of 400 mags and 30 pocketbooks for sale or will trade for good USA or foreign stamps* . . . For sale: AS, Jan. thru June '39, Mar thru Sept '48, all of '49, Spring '49 Quarterly; FA, Mar '48, May-Sept '48, all of '49, Spring '49 Quarterly; Unknown Worlds '48 anthology; assorted aSF SS & TWS. Carl H. Geist, 2323 W Ainslie St, Chicago . . . *Winchell Graff, 300 W 67 St, NY 23, wants pre* 1937 *WT; will trade Uncanny, Ghost Stories, large Amazings, Mystery-terror mags* '35-'36, *Munsey FFM's & FN's, MAZA OF THE MOON, LIFE EVERLASTING, SLAN and other books* . . . The New York Dianetic Association, 43 E 83 St, NY, NY will furnish aid and material to help other dianetics groups get started . . . *Gerry de la Ree, 277 Howland Ave, River Edge, NJ will buy any back issues of stf mags in good condition for* 10c *each; wants early issues of THE ACOLYTE and FANTASY COMMENTATOR, will pay cash or trade for other fanzines; will trade or sell at reasonable prices back issues of AS, FA, FFM, FN, PS, etc.* . . . Marvin Dorf, 2879 Tuckahoa Rd, Camden 4, NJ would like to get in touch with a Philadelphia fan group . . *Anyone knowing the address of Nick I. Falasca Jr please get in touch with Tom Covington, 315 Dawson St, Wilmington, NC. Tom also needs fiction material, 5000 words and under for his zine BIZARRE.* . . . Richard E. Roe, 1525 SE 36 Ave, Portland, Oreg will sell MARGINALIA, THE EYE AND THE FINGER, LOST WORLDS (autographed), and other hard to get Arkhams. Dick is 19, and would like to hear from pen-pals . . . *THE GALIEAN SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY, members being 18 yrs and under, is now being formed. For information write Dennis Lynch, 2834 Carlaris Rd, San Marino 9, Calif.*

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. . . *Jerry F. Cao, 8807 Col-*

(*Continued on page* 161)

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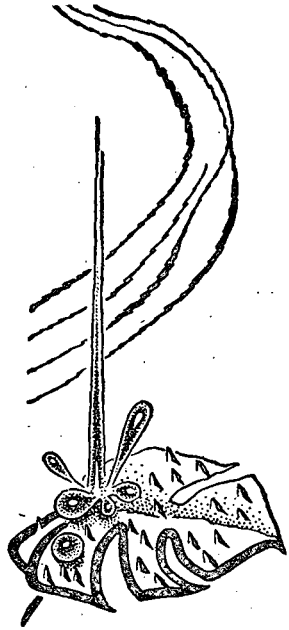

Only the god-color's golden glory could be a fitting gift—and Vroom found just the thing for

THE WEDDING PRESENT

By Lou Tabakow

"BUNK!" said Neil Stanley to himself. "What do those fat bureaucrats back in Venus City know about outpost natives? They sit in their air-conditioned offices reading reports and making out directives that just make it tougher on the guys stuck out in these god-forsaken swamps."

Still muttering to himself, he reread the memo.

"To All Personnel In Outlying Venusian Stations:

"It has been brought to the attention of the board that some of the operatives are becoming increasingly friendly with the natives. While in some respects this may lead to better co-operation, such practices must cease until a thorough study of the natives and their culture is completed by our sociological staff. It is recommended that contact between humans and aliens be held to a minimum, with no fraternization whatsoever. The unfortunate results of using human standards by which to judge alien thought patterns was forcibly brought out in the Martian debacle, where the rebellions are still a source of annoyance."

"Fine thing!" thought Neil. "They plant a guy out here on a year's contract and tell him to prepare a report on the flora and fauna of the region, and then turn around and order him to steer clear of the friendliest, most inoffensive creatures on any planet."

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"Gee, I wonder what Evelyn's doing now," he mused, as his mind went off on a pleasanter tangent.

The lovely golden-haired daughter of Venus City's only minister had her pick of the eligible men on Venus, but just three months previously she had promised to marry Neil, an unknown, penniless naturalist. They had talked over his assignment to the interior and decided that they just couldn't afford to pass up the ten-thousand dollar bonus and the chance for recognition the job would give him.

His revery was rudely shattered by the landing blasts of the supply rocket, which as usual was a week over-due.

* * *

Fifteen minutes later the pilot was stretched out on the hammock, balancing a gin fizz in one hand and a cigar in the other. A heavy-set stranger, whose deep sunburn attested to his recent arrival on Venus, sat facing Neil.

"I'm with Interplanetary News Service," the stranger informed him. "We are preparing a feature to acquaint our readers with the work being done here in anticipation of full colonization."

"I'll be glad to help you in any way I can," Neil offered.

"First of all," continued the correspondent, "our readers would like to know why you men on these outposts always work alone and are not allowed to return to Venus City until your contract is up."

"That's an easy one to answer," replied Neil. "We would like nothing better than to work in teams, but available specialists are so rare, and must be spread over so vast an area that there just aren't enough to go around. When the project was first started, the men were allowed a week's furlough every three months, but after getting back to civilization, so many reneged on their contracts that now no furlough time is allowed."

"I see," nodded the reporter. "Now, what can you tell me about the natives? Most people have a vague general idea that they are totally unlike any other intelligent life form yet discovered, but beyond that little is known."

"They certainly are different," smiled Neil. "If you've ever seen a mass of yeast buds under a microscope, that will give you an idea of their physical appearance, though they are of course vastly larger, ranging in size from one to five feet in diameter. They seem to have no proportion or symmetry whatsoever, with buds growing out at every angle. There is no sign of any appendages or sense organs, yet they seem to have a limited perception of color, ranging through the oranges and yellows.

"Though possessing no brain they are telepathic to a high degree, and if a human touches any part of their bulbous bodies, he can perceive their thoughts and they his. They are entirely parthenogenetic, and like

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certain lower life forms on Earth, are able to regenerate lost or injured parts. The buds can be shed at will and a new bud will grow to take its place, while the shed part takes on a life of its own with all the memories of the parent."

"How do you as a scientist account for vision without visual organs and intelligence, even telapthy without a brain?"

"The only satisfactory answer seems to lie in the cell nuclei. When a thorough study of these has been made I predict that the Venusian cell nuclei will be found to differ radically from those of any other form of life with which we are familiar."

"Are these strange creatures hard to approach?" asked the newsman.

"On the contrary," replied Neil, "they are the friendliest creatures imaginable, seeming to possess sympathy and kindness to a greater degree than most humans; though headquarters seems to think differently," and he handed the official memo to the reporter.

"We'll have to be shoving off," interrupted the pilot, reluctantly setting down his empty glass. "We'll just have time to make outpost forty-seven, and the Earth liner won't wait for you, you know. Anyway, Neil looks as though he's ready to die of impatience to get at his mail."

Neil had been eagerly shuffling his stack of mail and disappointedly found only one thin envelope from Evelyn.

EVEN before the plane had cleared the makeshift field he was eagerly reading:

Dearest Neil:

Please forgive the shortness of this note, but I have so much shopping and packing to do. I wanted to surprise you but *Dad* insisted I let you know beforehand so you could prepare. Dad has finally cut through the red tape and received permission for me to join you there. He will come down with me to perform the ceremony and then return with the supply rocket. It's been so long, Darling, but now we'll never be apart again.

I'll be seeing you soon,

Evelyn

Neil felt a light touch on his shoulder and looked up to see the bulbous monstrosity whose name sounded like a rocket taking off. The closest he could come orally to pronouncing the mental sound was Vroom.

"Hello Neil Stanley," came the thought. "I sense a feeling of happiness in you."

"You sense right," smiled Neil. "My fiancee is coming down to marry me."

"Fiancee; marry?" questioned the Venusian. "I do not understand."

"Explaining about the birds and the bees to an asexual being is a tough assignment," laughed Neil.

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"Let's see; you understand friendship. How do you feel when you are in close mental rapport with someone?"

"It sends a sort of glow through me," replied the native, "but in you I sense something more; an ecstasy, a longing that permeates every pore of your body. Only the god-color can so affect one of our race. Occasionally, however, one among us possesses within himself the true god-color, and just to be near such a one is joy. In your thoughts of your friend I perceive something of this feeling."

"I'm afraid my friend's only claim to the god-color is her hair," thought Neil. "As to the rest of her I'm afraid she's too pale to suit your fancy; but she sure suits mine."

"On joyous occasions it is the custom of our tribe to proffer gifts. Would it be against human dignity to accept a gift from a friend?"

"On the contrary; it would make me very happy," replied Neil. "We humans also offer gifts on such occasions. We call them wedding presents.'"

"That is good. I shall consult my brothers concerning a wedding present for our human friend," replied Vroom. "In the meantime I would like to have you witness our greatest ceremony. We can still reach the sacred grove in time, if we leave immediately."

For the better part of an hour they trudged through the soggy dripping jungle. The dim light that managed to penetrate the perpetual cloud blanket, sifted down through the pale green foliage, lighting the way with a ghastly hue.

No colorful birds swooped and zoomed here, nor sent out their sweet mating calls. All that could be heard was the squish, squish of Neil's boots as he sank ankle deep at every step, and the steady monotonous drip, drip, of water. This had been falling incessantly on this super-saturated world since before Earth history was recorded and would continue to thus fall, long after Man and all his works was forgotten.

For two hundred feet above them towered the ancient Bulta trees, silent sentinels, titans, who had stood thus unmoving for countless ages. They were lords of this miasmic world, whose huge transluscent leaves had never been stirred by the faintest breeze in this dim unchanging vale of eternal ennui.

On and on they marched through the pale green phantasmal world of dreadful silence, until Neil wanted to shriek aloud, to impress somehow his presence on this sightless, senseless, uncaring solitude. A premonition, a feeling of impending horror steeped his spirits in a deep malaise, as the folds of melancholia settled down upon him like a shroud.

SUDDENLY they were out of the jungle and stood on the outer fringe of an immense bowl-shaped

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depression, filled to overflowing with tier on tier of natives who were packed so closely together that they touched their neighbors on every side. In the exact center of the natural amphitheatre roared a huge bonfire, before which stood the largest Venusian Neil had ever seen. He was fully ten feet in diameter and of a bright orange hue. From time to time he plucked buds from his body and flung them on the blaze.

The huge assemblage swayed slowly, in unison, like a vast sea of life, a single undulating entity. Neil touched Vroom, and sensed an almost unendurable ecstasy, an awe, a feeling of cosmic beauty, that pulsed like a single heartbeat through the multitude.

"No wonder fire has such an effect on them," Neil mused. "Condemned to this nightmare world of eternal silence; seeing everything in different shades of harsh black and white; the warm color of flame is the only beauty they can ever perceive." Two lines from a poem sprang to his mind:

"I never saw a man who gazed
with such a wistful eye;
Upon that little patch of blue
that prisoners call the sky."

A feeling of nostalgia, a longing for the blue skies of Earth overwhelmed him.

For over an hour the weird ceremony went on while volunteers from time to time approached the blaze and flung parts of their living bodies upon it. The water-logged vegetation of this world was useless as fuel, Neil remembered with a start.

Finally the fire was allowed to die down and the assemblage dispersed quickly through the gloomy jungle; Neil and his guide remained until all but the bright-hued native had departed. He now approached them, and after a mental conversation with Vroom, broke off one of his buds and dropped it at Neil's feet.

"Take it," thought Vroom, touching Neil lightly. "It is his present to you. You can be near it the rest of your life and steep your soul in the god-color. I only wish I could bestow upon you so great a gift, but as you can perceive, I am only a pale imitation of the true god-color."

FOR over a month, Earth time, Neil had anxiously awaited the next rocket, which as usual was overdue. He had fashioned curtains, cunningly sewn, of the transparent wings of the giant sulu moth. On the dirt floor lay the furred hide of a guldu, which though soft as down, would shed any amount of water. The walls were tastefully decorated with pale green bulta leaves.

He had neglected his work while he lived in the sweet world of anticipation.

He would take her walking through the jungle, and she would gaze about her in fascination, just a little dread, and cling tightly to him for protection. She would slip

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in with coffee while he worked on his reports, and sit close to him. They would plan and talk of many things and dream great dreams that would draw them closer, ever closer. When she passed his chair during dinner she would lean over and rumple his hair and plant a light kiss on his cheek.

In his revery the pestilential swamp became an Eden. There was a touch on his shoulder and he looked up to see Vroom.

"Neil Stanley my friend," thought the native, "I have brought your wedding gift," and he proffered an inartistically wrapped parcel securely tied with lempen vines.

"Open it, my friend," thought Vroom, "that I may share in your joy. Never did I dream that I would be so fortunate as to get such a beautiful god-color for your wedding present!"

The vines were so tough that despite the sharpness of his knife, Neil had to hack at them; and as the last vine parted the parcel was jarred off the table and went bouncing and rolling across the dirt floor, shedding its covering of bulta leaves.

Neil stood there and screamed, and screamed; horribly; insanely; as he would for the rest of his life, seeing the light reflecting back the god-color in a glorious halo from the cascading golden hair.

THE END

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEWS

THE WORLD BELOW by S. Fowler Wright. Shasta Publishers, Chicago. 1949. 344 p. $3.50.

One of the least known and most praised "classics" of science fiction or fantasy to have appeared in the last generation is S. Fowler Wright's "The World Below." Collectors have found it unobtainable; few libraries ever had it; yet the poll conducted last year by *The Arkham Sampler* placed it among the first eight of the seventeen basic books of science fiction. Now Shasta has brought out a new edition in what it intends to be a library of fantasy classics.

The reader who knows Wright only from his "Deluge" and "Dawn" or from "The Island of Captain Sparrow" will find "The World Below" strangely different from any of the three—a kind of cross between "The Moon Pool" and Bulwer-Lytton's "The Coming Race." However, it seems to me that its closest relationship is with that macabrely unreadable masterpiece of the imagination, William Hope Hodgson's "The Night Land" (which Arkham House included in its Hodgson omnibus of a few years back, now probably sold out). The Hodgson novel dwelt in an incalculably distant future; "The World Below" is a story of the Earth half a million years from now—yet in both is the same dreamlike atmosphere, the same powerful suggestion of what cannot be expressed in words, the same sombre distortion of the familiar into the horridly grotesque. The two might be companion volumes.

"The World Below" is the story of a man sent into the far future to discover the fate of two who have gone before him. Before he succeeds he has lived out a nightmare year in a world of strange races and stranger forces, protected

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and aided by the furry creature known only as the Amphibian, hunted by the giant Dwellers of the Earth's labyrinthine bowels — the "world below" with its living books, its frozen pictures of the immemorably ancient past, its cruelly passionless laboratories, and its mysteriously significant war of the sexes—and is forced into pitched battle with the loathsome Killers of the inland heights.

The book is also—indeed, principally—a savage satire on the alleged civilization of his (and our) own kind and times. This is developed through frequent colloquies with the Amphibian, and these too-drawn-out discursions slow the book's pace at the same time that they give it a substantial philosophical content. We have to thank Shasta for another memorable addition to its rapidly growing shelf of science fiction and fantasy — but if ever a book did, this deserved a Hannes Bok jacket in place of the dully nondescript sheath with which it has been provided.

—*P. Schuyler Miller*

One of the top science fiction novels of 1950 is unquestionably, *The Man Who Sold the Moon* by Robert A. Heinlein. Readers who are avid book collectors will place this title on their "Best" list at year's end, while those who buy only a few books a year should go out of their way to get it.

The Man Who Sold the Moon (Shasta, $3) is history, deliberately created history. Heinlein worked out a master chart of a fictional history of the future, and many of his stories of the past ten years were tailored to fit into this chart. The history runs from 1951 to 2600 and the chart is included in this volume, with all the stories and their ages fitted into place.

The book contains six stories, including a brand new short novel that is a masterpiece of science fiction. "Life-Line" is the opening yarn, followed by "Let There Be Light," "The Roads Must Roll," "Blowups Happen," the title story, and "Requiem." The first deals with a man and his machine which can foresee but not change the future; the second with a pair of scientists who develop cold light; the third with a corps of engineers who maintain and operate the mechanized roadways, the rolling roads; the fourth with madness in an atomic plant, the fifth with a stupendous land-grab of the moon; and the sixth with what happened to D.D. Harriman, the man who made the grab.

In the manner in which historical events of yesterday shape the future we are living in today, each of the six yarns fits into and becomes a part of Heinlein's future history, shaping up to the climax that is the new novel, "The Man Who Sold the Moon." D.D. Harriman was a promoter, a schemer, an opportunist; he saw that the first man to reach and own the moon would have the world by the tail—and he also saw that the military machine of that man's nation would take the moon for its own in short order. So Harriman set about becoming the legal owner of the satellite even before he sent off the first rocket.

"Requiem," the final, short story, portrays the aftermath of Harriman's scheme, and the last days of Harriman himself, still dreaming of the moon.

More books in the future history series are to follow.

—*Bob Tucker*

Watch For It In The April Issue!

RED CORAL

by Raymond A. Palmer

COVER BY HANNES BOK

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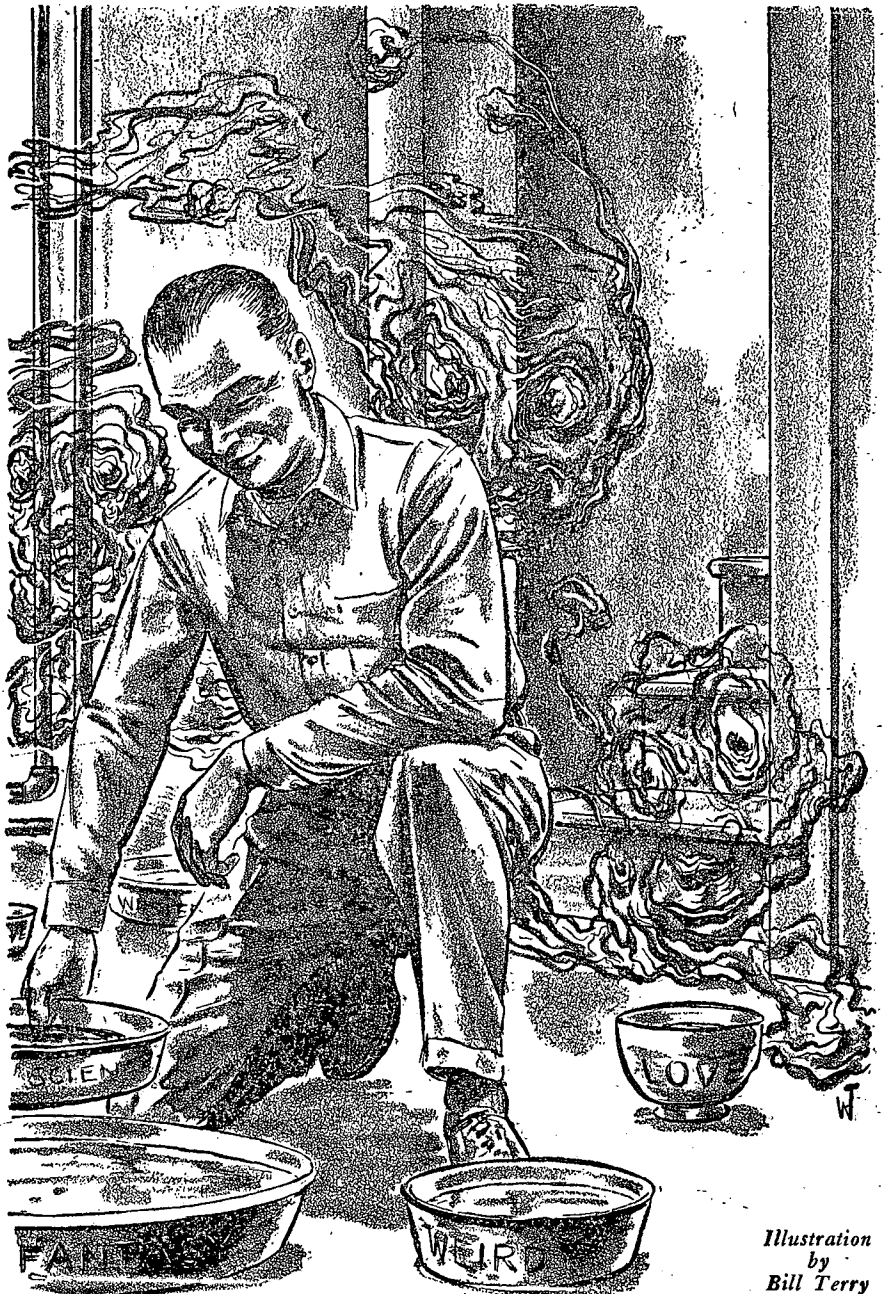

Illustration by Bill Terry

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THE PLOT MACHINE

By David H. Keller

Here's advice to those of you who want to write science fiction—from the old master himself. This is an actual speech he gave at a science fiction convention in Ohio.

THE night was warm, so the cellar door had been left open for complete circulation of air through the house. Colonel Bumble and his wife, Helen, were sleeping soundly in their first floor bedroom.

Up the cellar steps, slowly from step to step, slid a mass of protoplasm. At last, it arrived in the kitchen, oozed over the linoleum into the bedroom. There, by the bed, stretching a long, slender pseudopod upward, it started disappearing under a finger nail, into Mrs. Bumble's hand. Once in the bloodstream it floated rapidly to the woman's brain where it impressed memories. It then re-entered the circulation and passed out of her left hand, entered the body and brain of Colonel Bumble where it deposited similar memories. Happy in the consciousness of a worthy task well done, it returned to the cellar.

* * *

Helen Bumble awoke with a start. "I had a wonderful dream," she exclaimed to her husband. "It was the plot of a fine story. The sad part is that I have completely forgotten it."

"That's funny, I also dreamed of a story," her husband replied. "Knowing the remarkable telepathy which exists between us I'll bet anything that we dreamed the same plot. It is strange but I, too, have completely forgotten it. If we could remember the plot, write and sell it, it would be a welcomed addition to our bank account."

He was silent while dressing and equally wordless during breakfast. At last he finished his coffee, lit a cigarette and started to talk.

"Stories, my dear, are dependent on plots. Most of these are very old. To me it is evident that plots have life, otherwise they could not exist for so many centuries. I am going to try to prove their existence and then find some method of communicating with them."

"You are growing more peculiar every day, Horatio," Helen replied.

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"You know that plots are not alive, but even if they were, how could you talk to them?"

"I'll be able to find some method. In every historical and actual exploration into distant parts of the earth, as well as imaginary visits to the planets, the heroes have always been able to learn easily the language of the inhabitants, no matter how different. If they couldn't talk to them they, at least, were able to read and interpret each other's thoughts. I think I have as much basic intelligence as these explorers, at least I am going to experiment. Several problems have arisen and I won't be content until they are solved."

"Horatio, try to talk sensibly for once in your life. You and I both know that plots have no existence except in the imagination. I mean, they don't run around a cellar like ants or centipedes."

"You may be right, but I'm not so sure of it. Suppose we look at it from every angle. Since men started to tell stories they had to have plots. Some of these stories are very old and they have been repeated again and again, generation after generation. Very occasionally a writer uses a new plot and all the critics acclaim it; then some old man, who has done nothing but ruin his eyes reading, proves that this supposedly new plot was used by a story teller in India four thousand years before Christ. That gives us one definite bit of information about plots; they never die. They may sleep for years, like the Seven Sleepers of Ephisus, then someone finds them, wakes and revives them and they are as lively as ever, so he uses them in a supposedly new story.

"We really know a great many facts about plots. We have their description tucked away in the various pigeon holes of our mental literary desks. There are only a few basic plots, but each has many variations. We use them for stories and novels. Their physiology is well known, *but no one has ever seen a plot!* And no one knows how they enter the consciousness of the writer so he is able to employ them, either for his own pleasure or commercially.

"Yet plots must have an existence, and if so, they must live somewhere, for it is impossible for something which exists not to have a place to exist in. I don't believe they float through the air like stars in the sky. If that were true, there would be millions of writers."

"I seldom take you seriously," Helen said with a laugh, "but you certainly talk like no one I've ever heard."

"That is because there is only one Colonel Horatio Bumble. But—to continue—these plots probably live in isolated places—old houses, dark cellars, neglected attics — waiting for some ambitious young writer who will find them and want to release them from their seclusion.

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Finally, the embryonic Shakespeare or Poe begins a precarious existence in a cellar or attic and the plots living there know their hour of victory is at hand. They enter the writer's brain, he writes the story and at once it is sold—"

"Sometimes," interrupted Helen.

"Correct. Now, when they find a writer who harmonizes with them, they move into him by the dozen, by the hundred. Safely housed in his subconscious they bide their time till he has the all-compelling urge to write and then they pass over the threshold into his conscious and he writes.

"As you are too well aware, ever since we started to live in this house I have been writing stories. That convinces me that our home is a habitat for plots. They must be tenacious and optimistic to survive the treatment accorded to them."

"My opinion is that you don't believe a word you say," his wife remarked firmly.

"Then the only thing for me to do is to show you that I am right," he answered confidently.

BUMBLE spent most of the day in the cellar with his ultra violet movie camera. After supper he went to his dark room and developed the reel. When he projected it on the screen it so astonished him that he woke Helen. Even though it was nearly midnight, he insisted that she look at the pictures.

Protoplasmic life, shaped like enormous amoeba, moved twisting pseudopods. They resembled octopi of many sizes, but all had similar features. Occasionally a large one would seize and devour a smaller one. Helen watched in silence. Finally, at the end of the picture she asked:

"What are they?"

"I'm not certain," Bumble answered, "but I think they are plots. There is no doubt they are hungry. Tomorrow I will experiment with different kinds of food. Of course they wouldn't be able to eat bacon or even soft-boiled eggs but I have an idea that I'll be able to feed them."

"Perhaps they have been eating my jelly!"

"No. That is the favorite food of mice. Now I would advise you to go back to bed."

"I need coffee," she exclaimed. "Plots in the cellar and—goodness knows what will happen next."

* * *

The following morning Bumble looked over his stock of old magazines, selecting one of each kind: Science Fiction, Weird, Horror, Western, Space Opera, True Confessions and Slicks. These he shredded and separately macerated in hot water. He then strained the liquid through filter paper. Carefully labeling pie pans, he filled them with the different solutions and placed them on the cellar floor.

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Before supper he inspected the pans.

"Very interesting," he told Helen. "Some of the pans: Science Fiction, Weird and Fantasy, were completely dry. Other pans were full of liquid. The difference cannot be explained by evaporation. At least we now know what they want to eat, so I will prepare an abundance of their favorite food. This will make them grow rapidly and may end their cannibalism. Perhaps with proper nourishment a short-story plot will grow to a full length novel in a few days."

Helen sighed. "Of course it won't cost much to feed them for we certainly have a lot of old magazines, but how is all of this going to help us?"

"That is an important question. This business of being an author is getting me down, flat on my back, prostrate to the earth. If I were young and considered the world my oyster, I'd take a crowbar, pry open the bivalve and find the pearl of great price, the Great American Novel. But I find the crowbar heavy and unwieldy. However, I have a very interesting idea for a new machine."

"You always have ideas."

"Yes, but this one is important. My invention, if it works, will be a notable contribution to literature. Of course I don't know that it will work but it is worth trying. Unless a person tries, he accomplishes nothing. I will brood over the details while I am going to sleep and tomorrow I will build the machine."

At breakfast the next morning the Colonel announced that he intended to pre-empt the kitchen for the furtherance of his invention. He promised to clean up any mess he made.

AS Helen busied herself with the dishes, making the bed and other household chores she watched her husband gather a weird assortment of utensils and apparatus. Though she hadn't the slightest idea what he was making, it looked interesting.

He ran a thin copper tube through the key hole of the cellar door and joined it to the bottom of a funnel which he fastened to the door knob. Then he put a small table on the kitchen side of the door and on it placed his electric typewriter. He bored a number of very small holes through twelve inches of the tube, flattened it and ran it over the keyboard of the machine. Turning the tube, he ran it through a hole he had bored through the door and on the cellar side fastened another funnel to the tube. He then built a wire rack above the machine to hold and feed paper into it and another rack in front of the machine to receive the typed pages. All this took the best part of the day. At last he proudly announced that his invention was complete.

Helen looked at it in amazement

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and asked:

"What is it? What is it for?"

"That, my dear, may not solve the problem of all authors but it will make life easier for at least one author and his wife. This is how it works: A plot comes creeping up the stairs and finding a funnel marked *'Entrance'* creeps into the funnel and starts passing through the copper tube. The tube, when it passes over the key board, has a number of small holes in it and is so flat that only one word can go through at a time. Thus, word by word, the plot passes over the keyboard, and as it does the machine writes the story. When a page is written it falls into the lower basket and a new one is fed into the machine. After the plot passes through the tube it returns to the cellar.

"Comes the dawn! All we need to do is gather the completed manuscript, see that the pages are in proper order, slip it into an envelope and mail it to an editor. If it runs over sixty thousand words there will probably be only one a night. If short, we may have three or four stories by morning. Our production will be terrific; our income most gratifying."

"May I ask one question?"

"You certainly may. I am delighted that you so readily and completely grasp the essentials of such a complicated machine that you need ask only one question."

"Will it work?"

"That is a very vital question. How can I tell? The only answer is to wait and see. Either it will or it won't."

"Do you suppose the plots have sufficient intelligence to dictate the story as it should be written?"

"That also is for the future to decide. I believe these plots are very proud and think they know exactly how to express themselves. There is every reason to believe they are highly intelligent. Of course we do not know the type of story they'll write, but there is a market for every kind. They will write the stories and our job will be to find the right magazine or publisher for them."

The end of the day found the Colonel exhausted. There hadn't been too much physical exertion but the emotional strain had been intense.

"I feel like a creator," he said, relaxing in the deck chair in front of the pony house. "This invention may have far-reaching results. Conceivably, it might completely revolutionize the entire field of literary endeavor. I can imagine authors traveling from place to place hunting for plot colonies. They will try to find bait to lure plots to enter their machines. I'm pretty sure letters of acceptance would be some inducement, though publisher's checks would certainly work better. An author with a lengthy bibliography would receive more sympathetic and prompt treatment

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than an amateur. I can imagine one plot remarking to another; I'm going to hunt for a man who is internationally famous and widely quoted on every subject of importance, or even otherwise, just so he's quoted.'

"When an author dies, his house will bring a big price, for many ambitious authors will be sure that it is full of plots. Criminal writers will buy adjacent prop erty and tunnel into his cellar in an attempt to steal his plots. If scientists can determine that there are male and female plots they may make an effort to breed them. We could build a profitable business if we could breed and sell matched pairs. What do you think of it?"

"I think you are psychotic."

"You may be right. But tonight our sleep will be undisturbed. If we hear the clicking of the typewriter it will sound like distant waves beating against a rock-bound coast or wind soughing in the pine trees. Tomorrow will be an important day for us, my dear."

THE Colonel woke several times during the night, heard the typewriter tap-tapping and went to sleep feeling very happy. The next morning he rose earlier than usual and went at once to the kitchen. Helen was still asleep when he returned to the bedroom. He raised the shades, woke his wife and handed her a thick package of paper.

"What is this?" she asked drowsily.

"That, my dear, is a two hundred page story, written while we slept. Everything is there from title page to the final line—*The End*. My experiment was a remarkable success."

"Get me a cup of coffee and my glasses, please. I must read it at once."

Bumble put a kettle of water on to boil and went over to the machine. "It worked," he murmured with a smile. "It actually worked. No matter what else I've done in life *this* is important. Of course I won't know just how good or bad the story is until Helen has read it, but if plots can write their own tales it will make life much easier for both of us."

Arranging two breakfast trays he took them to the bedroom and there, as Helen read, they breakfasted. As she continued to be deeply interested in the story he cleaned the kitchen and went into the garden. After some time he looked through the window, saw that Helen was still engrossed in the story, so returned to weeding the long flower bed.

At eleven o'clock Helen, with the manuscript under her arm, joined him. There was a peculiar glint in her eyes.

"This is a most interesting story, Horatio. Are you sure the plot wrote it on the machine? Maybe you stayed awake all night and wrote it yourself."

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"How many pages?"

"Two hundred."

"That is the answer. You know I never wrote more than twenty-nine pages in one day."

"But it reads like one of your compositions. It has many of your trademarks."

"I positively did not write it. Tell me about it."

"It is titled *The Flying Flower,* which is the name of the heroine. She is very beautiful and lives alone in a dank woods. One day she is attacked by a very bad, dark man. She resists violently and in the ensuing struggle he tears off part of her clothing. Then she is rescued by the hero who kills the villian with a Bumble gun. The happy couple wander through the woods picking flowers while he recites poetry to her. Then, without previous warning, they are swallowed by a dragon. In the dark of his duodenum, irritated by digestive juices, the hero kills the dragon by stabbing him in the gall bladder. They escape by cutting a hole through the reptile's abdomen. After that they have eleven more adventures, each more hazardous than the other. They are finally married by a hermit priest, arrive safely at the hero's castle where they live happily ever after and——"

"I know," interrupted Bumble. "They have a baby."

"How did you know?"

"Simple. They have to have a baby. You said it was a Bumble story and always, when the characters are so nice, they have a baby. Give me the manuscript. I want to read it."

* * *

After supper Helen asked;

"What do you think of it?"

"A very fast moving tale. The plot is not new, but has some new twists that may make it acceptable. I'll set the machine tonight. Perhaps we'll get a few short stories."

Once again Bumble prepared the plot trap and placed three hundred sheets of paper in the automatic feeder rack.

"I suggest that we now try to get a good night's sleep," he said to Helen, "for, if my invention continues to work, and I hope it will, tomorrow we will have another novel to read or perhaps six short stories or thirty short-shorts."

"When will you start on my lily pond?"

"I don't know. Perhaps tomorrow if I can control my destiny, but we have no idea what the future has in store for us. We dodge, twist and run, but when fate strikes us we cannot escape. All we can do is to accept the inevitable. Thus you realize——"

"I certainly do", Helen interrupted. "You have a one track mind and right now it is running on the plot machine track." In a few minutes she was asleep.

Bumble listened and soon heard the clicking of the machine. With a deep sigh of contentment he too

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slept.

IN the morning he took the pile of typed pages from the receiving basket at the bottom of the machine. With interest he noted the title, *The Floating Flower*. Hastily he read the first fifty pages, then merely scanned the rest and checked the chapter headings. Carefully he clipped the manuscript into lots of fifty pages. While Helen still slept, he prepared toast and coffee which he took to her.

"Is there another story?" she asked.

"No, simply another manuscript. It is exactly as long as the first but with a different title and chapter headings. I've read only part of it but it seems to be the identical plot with minor changes. This novel is located in Africa instead of France and the dragon is stabbed in the pancreas instead of the gall bladder. Thus the heroine is covered with a milky secretion which adds to the beauty of her complexion instead of turning her yellow with bile. Much more of her clothing is torn off by the villian before he ties her to a tree. In fact she is so nearly nude that an artist could draw a fine colored illustration for a magazine cover."

"Why do they always tear the clothes off the heroine?"

"The answer is easy. How can the hero tell whether he wants to rescue her if she has on all of her clothing plus a rain coat. To go on with the story—the ending will not please you and it certainly disturbs my moral sense. She gives birth to a baby before they are married."

"After all, a man and woman don't have to marry to have a baby," Helen observed.

"Not in real life, but if a story is to be published and read by nice people they have to marry sometime, even if it is on the last page. That is absolutely necessary. In many novels the hero is away from earth for many years, traveling in a space ship or spends months in a jungle or on a desert island and he always has a very beautiful woman with him. Do they fall in love? Do they have babies, married or unmarried? They do not! They just remain good pals and are never troubled by the biological urge. Men and women have to be celebate if their adventures are ever printed."

When Helen finished the novel she joined her husband.

"This is perfectly terrible in places," she said. "I never thought you had such ideas."

"What do you mean? You know I did not write it."

"But it is your plot."

"No. It is simply a plot living in my cellar and in my opinion it is undergoing moral deterioration. If this continues I will get into serious trouble. Why I might even be arrested. It will be impossible to convince a jury that it was written on a machine by a plot and that I

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am in no way responsible. Such a defense as this would land me in a hospital for the insane instead of a jail. It has made me do a great deal of serious thinking.

"I'm certain there must be many nice plots in the cellar; stories I would be proud to sell, but with this machine only one plot can come through at a time. There must be one strong plot which is evidently an exhibitionist and very much of a bully. When evening comes it drives all the nice gentle plots into corners where they cower in fear. Then this bully plot rushes into the funnel and once again passes through the machine. It must be intelligent and very likely believes that if it changes the title and chapter headings I will think it is an entirely new plot. If this continues it will be very serious. If it was a fine tale with humor and gentle style, the constant duplication might not make any difference, but this plot shows a definite decadence and places an increasing emphasis on phases of biological life not mentioned in polite society.

"I shall try the machine again tonight and if this same plot writes the same story I'll take the necessary action."

"Fumigate the cellar?"

"No. I'll simply disconnect the machine, open the windows and bulkhead and the plots will leave."

In spite of his promises Bumble delayed dismantling the plot machine. By the end of the week he had seven manuscripts, all with the same plot. These he carefully numbered and placed serially in his files.

"We are witnessing," he observed to Helen, "the rapid deterioration of a plot's morals. I have had an opportunity to observe something that, so far, no psychiatrist has seen. However, it is not an unusual occurence in literature. In this case I have observed a diseased plot pass from decent writing to sheer pornography in exactly one week. From now on, I'll look for an explosion of thought, repetition of phrases, errors in grammar and construction. I can only hope that the kind, gentle and beautiful plots have not been contaminated."

THE next morning the Colonel rose early. He had not heard the now familiar steady clicking of the machine during the night, so he was not surprised to find the basket below the machine practically empty. A few sheets lay at angles and he noticed that there were only a few lines on each page, mostly disconnected sentences, meaningless combinations of words, lines typed and XXXed out. Three times the novel had been titled and each was different. The last was *The Flower in the Cesspool*. On the last sheet was only one line:

"I can write no more."

Bumble disconnected the machine, removed the copper tubes from the holes in the door and opened it.

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There, just inside, on the top step, were a few little drops of colloidal material which the Colonel carefully drew into a sterilized medicine dropper.

"That is the end of the plot," he mused. "At one time it had promise of becoming great. I will send this specimen to a laboratory and have it tested."

In a few days a report came; "Wasserman Test 4 plus."

Days of anxious disinfection followed, and the difficulty was to avoid injury to the healthy plots. However, this problem, like all others in Colonel Bumble's life, was easily solved. He finally announced calmly to his wife that there would be no more such cases.

The machine was once more assembled and the next morning the Bumbles were delighted to find in the wire basket six short fantasies. All were at once mailed, and in a few days six letters of acceptance were received from editors who were highly enthusiastic and wanted more of the same kind. These letters were placed at once on little bulletin boards at the garden entrances to the cellar. It was soon evident that new plots were entering the Bumble cellar by the dozen. Every morning stories were found in the wire basket and the variety was so large that very soon the Bumbles were selling to so many magazines they had to use a dozen nom-de-plumes.

Six months of continued success in selling stories passed and then the Colonel made a typical Bumble announcement.

"We are growing old, Helen, and have reached the pinnacle of fame. We know many young ambitious authors who are not too successful. The time has come to share our good fortune with them. I will prepare a small booklet describing the plots and the machine they use. We'll give them permission to use the machine and even furnish them with a pair of young plots with direction for their feeding and care. Then they can breed plots—and sell the stories."

"Horatio! You do not think that our plots are male and female?"

"They certainly are. If you read our printed stories you can easily determine whether they were written by a male or female plot. Of course I'll have to be careful in matching them before I send them out. Think of the disastrous results if I matched a Louisa Alcott plot with a Tarzan plot! But I'll work out these problems in a very short time. I am certain that several youthful writers will be delighted to get the paired plots and the little book of directions. Of course so many fine stories will be written that the young men will have to be careful not to glut the market."

Helen smiled.

"I think you are a very wonderful man, Horatio."

THE END

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NEWS OF THE MONTH

Latest reports on what our readers are doing. Fan clubs, social events and personalities in the limelight.

Rap sends word from Wisconsin that all is well with the Northern Branch of Clark Publishing Company and that he is being kept more than busy. He's battling snow-drifts and getting settled on his farm with one hand, writing stories with the other and some way still finding time to write his "we ain't got no policy" editorials and handle the one-hundred-and-one problems that beset an editor-publisher.

We've been receiving a large number of fanzines lately, and in case you've wondered why yours wasn't reviewed, here's the answer. Quite a few of the other magazines do run fanzine reviews, so rather than duplicate information which can be found in these other magazines we've decided to use the space instead for Personals, News of the Month, (since these features do *not* appear in other stf mags), or a longer letter column. Okay?

Bill Hamling, former editor of Fantastic Adventures, left Ziff-Davis when they moved their offices to New York and has gone into business for himself. Yes, he bought Imagination from us lock, stock and inventory. The Greenleaf Publishing Company, 1426 Fowler, Evanston, Illinois will be turning out the magazine with publisher-editor Hamling at the helm. Best of luck to the new Imagination from the Other Worlds staff.

The Miami University Science Fiction Association (MUSFA, that is) is determined to bring enlightenment to the rest of the students. They have induced the University library to buy a dozen or so stf books and have even donated six books and a subscription to Astounding (huh?) in an effort to make the campus science-fiction conscious.

The next World Science-Fiction Convention is going to be held in the glamorous city of New Orleans. If you haven't done so already, send your membership dollar to Harry Moore, 2703 Camp Street, New Orleans 13, La. and join the Nolacon Membership Committee.

Starting with the April issue of Other Worlds, we will once again be having special features on the inside covers. The April feature will be a series of science-fiction photos by George Earley, Bethesda, Md. fan and one of MUSFA's leaders. The June cover feature will be a biographical article complete with photos, about artist J. Allen St. John, whose outstanding work is well known to all Tarzan fans and science-fiction readers. Send in your list of famous science-fiction authors, and artists that you would like to see featured in this department. We'll do our best to run articles on those personalities which are requested by the largest number of readers. As we've said before, Other Worlds is your magazine, so get busy and tell us what you want in it.

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By Ray Palmer

EYE OF THE TEMPTRESS

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Illustration by H. W. McCauley

Beginning with Eve, each period of our history has been influenced by a beautiful woman. But have you ever stopped to wonder *why*? Take, for instance, our present day temptress. . . .

"EVEN if it misses, everybody from New York to Chicago will be scared right out of their pants."

"And if it doesn't . . . ?"

"A lot of Americans will die—especially, for instance if the hit is directly on Cleveland."

The chief astronomer at Williams Bay Observatory gave up his place

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at the telescope to his assistant, who peered fascinatedly into the night sky.

"Weird looking thing, isn't it?" he asked, after a moment. "Doctor Mellody, it looks like a gigantic eyeball."

"Yes, Tony. That black spot in the center does make it look like an eyeball, now that you mention it. What I can't understand is how it remains precisely placed in the center of the asteroid; apparently the asteroid isn't rotating in relation to its present course toward Earth—or it's rotating so slowly that we haven't had enough time to detect it."

"Isn't that an unsual state of affairs?"

"Extremely. For a migrant asteroid, its behavior is freakish. Ordinarily, a hunk of rock of that size would have a variety of motions, constantly changing due to outside influences: It almost seems to be able to correct its own course and influence its own motion, independent of gravitational interferences . . . "

" . . . like a living thing, rather than a piece of rock?"

Doctor Mellody grinned. "You read too many comic books, Tony Marcus. That black center might suggest, for example, an amoeba, but a living thing that size, in space, is preposterous. Maybe that eyeball effect suggests such possibilities—almost has a hypnotic effect when you stare at it."

Tony Marcus clambered from the seat before the eyepiece. "So you *don't* like comic books, Doctor Robert Mellody," he grinned back. "But I agree it's hypnotic. For a second, there, it seemed to be growing larger at an enormous rate. I had to blink to regain optical reality."

"It's going to be more than an optical reality within twenty-four hours," the doctor suddenly became very serious. "Although we haven't had time to chart an exact path, I'd say the thing will come within a thousand miles of the Earth as it passes over the northern hemisphere from the east. It should reach its closest point—or even collide! — somewhere between New York and Chicago."

"We ought to get a good view of the spectacle," Marcus said.

Doctor Mellody snorted. "A good view! It'll be terrific. Let me picture it for you: About two in the morning, tomorrow, it will appear as a bright light over the horizon to the east. First we'll see a crescent, lit by the rising sun behind it—something like a sword of Damocles, to wax poetic, over the eastern states. Then the crescent will rush in, growing less crescent-shaped until it passes overhead, when it'll become a globe. At that time it will enter our outer atmosphere and in a few seconds friction will set it afire. At first there'll be tremendous gouts of black smoke and red flame, then it'll take on a cherry glow,

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and finally a greenish brightness will be followed by a light as bright as the sun. This won't last long, because masses of smoke will obscure the whole picture and exploding fragments will fly in all directions with a fireworks display that'll make anything you've ever seen before seem tame by comparison. The blackness that settles after that will make it possible to watch the thing go off into space again."

"But what if it hits?"

"Nobody'll get a very clear idea of what he is seeing—if he sees *anything* but black and red. To those directly in the path of the asteroid, there'll be a horrible brightness and heat, a pressure wave, and a thundering explosion none of them will hear. To those outside the direct contact area, there'll be a tornado of sound, wind, flame and fragments that will demolish cities as completely as though an atom bomb had struck them. To those still further away, there will be winds beyond belief, rains, storms and shock waves so destructive that the earthquake shocks that accompany them may hardly be noticed. Actually, if the asteroid is the size I think it is, the earth shocks may be worse than those that knocked out Tokyo and interior China in 1920. If you remember, more than a million died in that quake."

"You're not exactly happy about our position here at Williams Bay then?"

"We'll get a *lovely* view of the whole thing," admitted the doctor. And if it lands anywhere near Chicago, it would plow a furrow right up to our front door and push us into the Mississippi — only we wouldn't know it."

"I've always wanted to die in a grand way," Marcus said. "Spectacular deaths are quick."

"Better than cancer. But don't order your coffin yet—our observations are too limited to give us any accurate figures. We could be as much as five thousand miles off."

"In that case, think of the pictures we'll get!" Marcus said enthusiastically.

"You and your camera!" Doctor Mellody laughed. "But that's something we do have to get busy on. Let's get every plate in the observatory set up for use. I've got to check with Harvard by phone first to see if they have any new bearings, then I'll help you."

TONY Marcus watched his superior hurry out of the telescope room, then turned and stared up through the open dome. The asteroid was still too far away and too small to be apparent to the naked eye; nothing was visible except the usual sparkling stars twinkling through the clear Wisconsin air. Frowning, Marcus slid once more into the seat.

Exactly centered in the eyepiece, the asteroid glowed with a soft, greenish gray, seeming almost transparent rather than solid. Still pre-

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cisely in the position of the pupil of a giant eye was the baffling black spot, a pool of ink, a bottomless pit into the depths of the asteroid.

Marcus grunted angrily. "Impossible! How can it have such an absolute lack of rotation? It's moving and the viewpoint is changing constantly. If it has any rotation, it's exactly enough to compensate for the deviation that would be caused by its progress through the heavens; which coincidence is even more impossible!"

He stared at the onrushing object, fancying he could see tiny veins of red in the gray area surrounding the black spot. It seemed to enlarge itself hypnotically, growing until it filled the entire eyepiece. Waves of dizziness shot into Marcus' brain.

"By thunder," he gasped, stumbling from the chair and rocking on his feet, "they'd better not put that thing on television!" He closed his eyes tightly until the dizzy spell passed, then opened them on the relieving blackness of the observatory. "Got to get those plates ready," he mumbled. "You can't hypnotize a camera . . ."

* * *

PATRICIA Clio noted without looking that the handsome young man waiting at the bus stop was observing her while looking at nothing at all. Patricia knew she had a good figure and she was used to being stared at, covertly or not. Usually she paid no attention, but tonight she was particularly aware that he was young, dashing, wholesome. She drew a tiny lace handkerchief slyly from her dress pocket and let it flutter to the sidewalk as she passed.

For an instant the young man seemed about to ignore the handkerchief, then a flush of red suffused his features. He retrieved the lacy square and hastened after her. She looked straight ahead, but walked slower so that he could catch up with her more quickly. He pulled up beside her.

"Here's your calling card," he handed her the handkerchief.

Patricia felt the blood suffuse her neck. She halted in her tracks, whirled and faced the young man, saw that his features were drawn tight in scorn. She slapped his face hard.

He returned the slap instantly, rocking her back on her heels. Her mouth took on a round O, of shock and surprise.

"Go ahead and call a cop," he invited. "You've sure got a corner on stupidity pulling a virtue act after that display."

"What are you calling a display?" she blazed, angry now to the core.

He laughed shortly. "Wouldn't you say that acting the part of a street-walker was a display? If I ever saw a handkerchief deliberately dropped, that was it. Go ahead, say it wasn't."

She glared at him, shaking with anger, but she was silent for a long

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instant. "It *was* deliberate," she admitted at last, stiffly and with paling cheeks, an expression of alarm and concern growing on her face. "Yes! But why did I do it?" She was completely bewildered.

"Need I elaborate on the reason?" he snorted.

Staring into his contemptuous eyes, she felt ashamed and embarrassed. "No," she said faintly. "You needn't. It's obvious enough — but though you won't believe it, it wasn't the reason at all. There *wasn't* any reason. I don't do such things. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't pick you up if you were—" she hesitated and looked at his face closely, then rushed on "—*unless* you were properly introduced!"

With flaming face, she turned and ran.

Behind her, the young man looked after her blankly, but she didn't see that. Nor did she hear him mutter, "What in Hades was all that about?" Instead she was engaged in a conflicting turmoil of thoughts and emotions.

Pat, you idiot, have you gone crazy? She felt a surge of panic as she half believed she was. She rounded a corner before she dared slow to a walk. She felt the lace handkerchief in her hand, flung it from her in renewed anger, then picked it up again and stuffed it defiantly into her pocket. *Of all the nutty impulses* . . . She stopped walking as she realized it wasn't that at all. She wasn't given to impulses. It was her habit to think things out deliberately, then act only when she was sure of what she wanted to do.

"I *wanted* to do it!" she said aloud.

Then, since it wasn't a deliberated act, it was impulse. What had caused it?

She resumed walking, reflectively. *I wanted to do it so badly that it was almost a compulsion, as though I had been in the habit of doing such things for years. Why, I couldn't have done it more crassly professionally if I'd been in the business!* She blushed.

I never did it before! The thought was expressed defensively, as though she wanted to convince someone of the fact. The man at the bus stop? *Why on Earth should I? I don't know him from Adam* . . .

Once more she stopped in her tracks. "But I'd like to!" She said it so loudly her voice echoed back to her from the buildings along the street.

Need I elaborate on the reason? His remembered voice echoed through her mind, and panic closed down over her again. She hurried toward her apartment, rushed into the bedroom and flung herself onto the bed in tears. But they vanished almost immediately as she exulted subconsciously in the thrilling surge of her blood through her vibrant young body.

She got up, disrobed, and stood in front of the mirror, gazing at

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herself critically and with satisfaction. "Mr. Freud," she declared, "it isn't *all* in the head, and I can prove it!"

Inwardly, however, her scientific training frowned on this evidence of body over-mind. There was something here, more than the eye could see . . .

* * *

HE got off the bus and hurried up the walk toward the looming dome of the Williams Bay Observatory. The ride around Lake Geneva had been very beautiful, but he had given it little attention. Instead, his mind was occupied with the chilling knowledge he had come here to check. He thought of his calculations of the past few days and his observations with his small, homemade telescope, and he shook his head. If those calculations were accurate it would mean . . .

What it meant was submerged, somehow, in an extremely irrelevant thought. He found himself looking once more into a flushed young face, and picturing himself handing a small square of lace to her. *Your calling card* . . .

That had been a mean thing to say. Why had he said it? If he was anything, he felt that he was civil and polite, and a respecter of womanhood. With a flush he realized that it had been his own desire regarding the girl, flashing upon him so suddenly as she passed, that had made him say such a thing. He felt guilty about it, and wished now that he could apologize. Or better still, take her out. If he'd meet her this instant, to hell with the asteroid and checking his observations . . . .

He found himself ringing the bell at the observatory door, and wrenched his mind back to reality. Sure, she was a lovely girl, and he'd muffed the grandest chance of his life; but he'd never see her again—if anybody could see anybody in twenty-four hours!

The door opened and a gray-haired man faced him.

"I'm Jules Cezar," he said. "You don't know me, but I'm an amateur astronomer, and if my calculations are right, I've got something mighty serious to discuss with you. That asteroid is going to hit right here . . . "

"Come in," said Doctor Mellody abruptly. "I'd like to see those figures. We'd estimated it might hit about Cleveland, or maybe miss the Earth by as much as five thousand miles."

"It won't miss!" Jules said grimly, stepping inside the door. "It's due to hit, this time."

"This time?" Doctor Mellody took his visitor's hat. "What do you mean by that?"

"Just that I think I've identified the object, and that it has been close to the Earth on enough occasions to give us a good calculation of its actual orbit. For instance, it appeared during Napoleon's time, to mention one of the latest appear-

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ances, and it appeared in old times in the reign of the Queen of Sheba, and of Cleopatra . . . "

"Hardly accurate dates to calculate an exact orbit on," said Doctor Mellody.

"Hardly," agreed Jules. "But I merely mentioned names to serve as an illustration. I have the exact dates, of course, and although the older dates are problematical, I have enough recent observations to give us correct figures even on the older dates. But I've got to have access to all your records on comets . . . "

"Comets . . . " Doctor Mellody frowned. "But this isn't a comet."

"It is. And it will be obvious by nightfall—as soon as it approaches the sun sufficiently to melt the frozen gases surrounding the central core."

The Doctor stared. "Sit down, Mr. Cezar. I'll call my assistant, Tony Marcus, and we'll go over the records."

THREE hours later the three men faced each other with grim countenances.

"That's it," said Doctor Mellody slowly. "There can be no doubt of it."

Tony Marcus looked bleak. "Doesn't seem to be."

"Yes. This thing, whatever it is, has an orbit like a comet, and returns periodically to the solar system. Always it passes quite close to the Earth, and sometimes closer than others . . . " Jules Cezar glanced significantly aloft as he talked. "Some of those times the Earth has passed through the tail of the comet, through its melted gases, and each time there has been some significant event in history. A great war, or a pestilence, or some such disaster."

Tony Marcus grinned. "Judging from the instances you mentioned, the trouble has been a woman, most of the time. Cleopatra, the Queen of Sheba, Marie Antoinette, Anne Boleyn, Delilah, Salome . . . "

"What did you say?" asked Jules, staring directly at him.

"I didn't say it," Tony said blankly, "you did."

"That cinches it!" exclaimed Jules. "That proves it's the same celestial body. The girl with the handkerchief . . . !"

"Girl with the handkerchief? What are you talking about . . . or rather, who, and what does it prove . . . ?"

"He's talking about me," came a voice from the doorway. "And it was very nice of him to say I have a celestial body. I hardly thought he had looked me over that well!"

"Pat!" exclaimed Tony with pleasure, leaping to his feet and going over to her. He took her by the arm and led her back to the other two. "Patricia Clio, my fiancee, Mr. Cezar. Pat, this is Jules Cezar. He's an astronomer, of the amateur type, but I can tell you he's a good one. He's come to us with

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some figures that have . . . " he halted, grew red.

"Have what?" asked Patricia.

Jules looked at her closely and she began to blush. "Just confirmed some observations on the new *celestial body,*" he said with emphasis on the last two words. "And incidentally, I want to say that I have revised my opinion of the handkerchief episode."

"You have new observations?" she asked archly.

"No."

"Then on what basis do you change your opinion. I *did* drop it purposely."

"What's all this about?" asked Tony blankly.

Patricia turned and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Oh, I just tried to pick Mr. Cezar up at the bus stop. I used the old trick of dropping a handkerchief, and he accused me of being a street walker."

Tony's face grew dark and he turned on Jules. "What's that?" he said. "Is this true?"

Patricia looked calculatingly at Tony, then at Jules, and laughed deliciously. "Certainly it's true," she said. "What else could he say? I was acting the part of a tramp to perfection."

Tony turned to Patricia unbelievingly. "You were? What on Earth for?"

"Need I elaborate on that?" asked Patricia, looking straight at Jules.

JULES' face was flaming now. "Please, Miss Clio," he said. "Don't let's rub it in. I've apologized, and I did it *before* this exchange, so you must know it was sincere."

"Oh, I don't doubt that," said Patricia, "but how do you know you're right in apologizing? If you are a good man at figures, you should know that you haven't a shred of evidence to warrant an apology. And if you are just being civil, I don't like it."

"Why not?"

Patricia drew her young body up proudly before him. "Need I elaborate on that?" Her eyes looked Jules up and down calculatingly.

"Pat!" said Tony in shocked tones. "What's come over you? Don't you think you've carried a joke far enough?"

"It isn't a joke," said Jules calmly.

Tony's face grew black again, and his hands clenched at his sides. "That sounds like an insult to me," he said grimly. "And this time I think an apology is really in order . . . "

"No offense," said Jules. "It's all the fault of the comet."

"The comet?" asked Doctor Mellody interestedly, coming into the conversation for the first time.

"Yes. Tony, when you mentioned that the trouble was generally a woman, when the comet came through the solar system, I think you were hitting the nail on the

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head. I know it doesn't sound sensible, but it *is* true that every time the strange object has passed the Earth, it has done something to its people. You have said it seems to have a hypnotic effect. Why, then, shouldn't it have an emotional effect on all human beings? After all, the ancients believed the stars guided our destinies. Perhaps there was some basis for their belief. Maybe this strange object in space is the basis for those beliefs. Maybe this object is the basis for Miss Clio's strange behavior. She told me immediately, she didn't know why she was doing it. Maybe Delilah didn't, either; or Salome. Maybe Napoleon set out on the conquest of the world because there was some strange emotional influence that drove him to it."

Patricia's laugh rang through the room. "How unscientific, and what pure bunk," she said. She drew her lacy handkerchief from her pocket. Whirling on her heel, displaying her body to greatest advantage, she dropped the handkerchief to the floor and walked suggestively from the room. At the outer door she paused an instant, and a hand gripped her by the elbow.

"Your handkerchief, Patricia," said a man's voice softly.

She turned and took the handkerchief from his extended fingers. "Why, Doctor Mellody, how perfectly gallant!" she exclaimed. She kissed him on the lips, and then ran down the stairs outside.

Doctor Mellody watched her go, a thoughtful look on his face.

* * *

THE night wore on. The three astronomers made repeated observations, and at morning, Doctor Mellody wore a haggard look. His concern was mirrored to a lesser extent in the face of Tony Marcus, who frowned often, apparently thinking of something else. Jules Cezar was deep in thought, and many times he caught himself looking reflectively at Marcus and watching the expressions chase each other across the junior astronomer's face.

"You'd better let me take a spell at that telescope," he said abruptly. "I think the thing's getting you."

Marcus looked at him a moment angrily. "How do you mean, getting me?"

"You're thinking of Miss Clio too strongly," said Cezar, bluntly. "And if my theory is right concerning this comet, it might be better for you to try to forget her till this is over."

Marcus looked at him. "And you *aren't*, thinking of her," he said truculently. "Maybe you *are* right about the comet!"

"We can thrash that out after the danger is over . . . "

Doctor Mellody interrupted the conversation. "I'd say the danger, when it is over, will have as effectually delayed your settlement as now, or more so . . . since we'll all be dead!"

Marcus whirled on the senior

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astronomer in an attitude of stunned shock. "Are you sure of that? You've abandoned the possibility that you've made an error in your calculations?"

Doctor Mellody nodded. "The comet will strike this immediate area a glancing blow sometime this evening; or before! There can be no doubt of it."

Tony Marcus looked at Cezar. "How far from here will the effects be catrastophic — say in a southerly direction?"

Doctor Mellody shrugged. "I'd say South America might have a chance to survive, but the area from here to the Gulf and north to Hudson Bay will be pretty much devastated. No life will be possible except on the outer fringes. From Detroit to Denver, the result will be the same. Since the blow will be a glancing one, the earth shocks may not be so bad, but the atmosphere in this area will burn up almost completely. Other places on Earth will be subjected to violent hurricanes and winds up to five hundred miles per hour, due to the replacement of the burned atmosphere."

"Then the thing to do is to leave here immediately, by air, and head south. If we can reach Rio, or some such city, we might have a chance to survive!" exclaimed Marcus.

Doctor Mellody shrugged again. "Who can tell? Personally, I think any flight is hopeless."

Marcus looked at him, then at Cezar. "Gentlemen," he said. "I think that inasmuch as there is nothing we can do here, we might as well try to save our lives. So, Doctor Mellody, if it's okay with you, I'll leave right now, and pick up Pat. My own plane will take me to the Gulf, and I think there we can take one of the Airways planes to South America. Nobody really knows, but us, *where* the comet will hit, or that it *will* hit, and nobody will know where to flee. So getting a plane shouldn't be too hard. At least, I am going to make the try."

Doctor Mellody looked at him a long moment. "You have my permission, my boy. As for me, I'll stay here."

Marcus looked at Cezar. "And you?"

"I think I'll fly too, but in another direction."

A relieved expression flitted across Marcus' face. "Good idea," he said. "And since we've all made up our mind, I don't think we should waste time. The farther we get . . . "

Doctor Mellody put out his hand. "Good luck, my boy. And if you live, think of the pictures I'll be getting!"

For an instant Marcus hesitated, then he shook the extended hand. "I won't forget," he promised. "And all the time I'll be hoping your calculations are wrong, and that the comet misses the observatory. If so, I'll be back."

He shook Cezar's hand also, and then hurried out.

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DOCTOR Mellody looked at Cezar, who was watching Marcus' departing back. "And *which* way are you flying?" he asked shrewdly.

Jules Cezar stared at the older man. "East," he said. "That way the course of the comet will be to my advantage."

"A good idea," approved Doctor Mellody. He thrust out his hand again. "And you'd better be on your way too."

Cezar shook hands with the older man, looked at him thoughtfully a moment, then picked up his hat. "Goodbye," he said. "I've enjoyed my short association with you. If the observatory survives, I'd like to work here . . . "

"And you will!" said the doctor warmly. "If it survives. That's a promise!"

Jules Cezar cast a last look at the giant telescope, then turned on his heel and left. Once outside he hurried down the road toward the village, and once there, entered a drugstore and sought the phone book. As he paged through it, the features of Patricia Clio floated before his eyes. Once he had assured himself of her apartment address, he left the drugstore hurriedly and made his way to the bus station. He had to wait nearly an hour for the next bus, only to find that it would be a half-hour in leaving. Burning with impatience, he paced up and down in the station until leaving time.

It was after noon before he reached the street where Patricia's apartment was located, and he hurried toward it with the feeling that he would be too late. By this time, Tony Marcus would have arrived in his car and taken Pat away with him.

After all, he told himself angrily, she was Tony's fiancee, and it was insane of him to think that there was any sense in him making this trip. And if he did meet them, it might only result in a fight. Tony would be sure to resent it, and Jules felt sure that in his present frame of mind, his reaction might be quite violent.

But Jules himself felt impelled toward the apartment by a force that was beyond all reason. She *had* looked at him *that* way. A hunger filled him, made him ache with a peculiar longing to hold her in his arms. It was stronger than all reason, and he thrust the propriety of his mad pursuit from him with a physical gesture of contempt. This was no time for propriety—death stared them all in the face, and there was little enough of happiness and satisfaction to snatch at.

He reached the apartment almost on the run and dashed up the stairs. At the entrance he noted the name *Miss Patricia Clio* over the number 4 and he pressed the buzzer. There was no answer. But as he stood there, a man entered the front door, opened the inner door with his key, walked down

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the hallway inside. Jules grabbed at the doorknob before the latch clicked, held it a moment. Then when the man inside had disappeared, he opened the door and made his way swiftly up the stairway to apartment four.

There was no answer to his knock, only silence. But within Jules Cezar now was only a furious flame that urged him on without regard for consequences. Hurling his shoulder against the door, he snapped the latch and the door banged inward. Stepping hastily inside and closing the door, he took a few steps toward the bedroom, visible just ahead, then halted with sharply indrawn breath.

Sprawled out on the floor, face down, was the body of Tony Marcus, a wooden-handled kitchen knife protruding from between his shoulder blades.

FACE white, Cezar knelt beside the body, turned it over sufficiently to see the face. There was no doubt about it—Tony Marcus was as dead as any striking comet would ever make him!

Jules rose shakily to his feet. Who had done it? Had it been Patricia? But no, what reason would she have had? And that knife . . . He stopped to examine the grim handle and shook his head. No woman could have wielded that knife so vigorously as to sink it into a man's back to the hilt. It was a broad-bladed heavy bread knife, and no sharper, he guessed, than any other bread knife. Women were poor hands at keeping knifes sharpened, especially in these days of already-sliced bread.

Someone had been here before him, had intercepted Marcus, and had obviously made off with Patricia. But no . . .

Cezar shook his head angrily. That wasn't the answer at all! Patricia Clio would never had gone willingly with Marcus' killer, nor could she have been forced to leave in broad daylight. Somehow Cezar knew that she was not the type to be intimidated in that manner. Then there was only one answer . . . she hadn't been in the apartment when the killing took place. Even now she must be entirely unaware of what had happened!

In a blinding flash of realization, Jules Cezar knew the answer, and as swiftly as the knowledge came to him, he raced from the apartment and down the stairway. He dashed into the street, stopped the first motorist and flung open the car door.

"One hundred dollars if you get me to the Observatory right away!" he panted.

The driver, a man dressed in overalls, blinked rapidly once or twice. Then he grinned. "Put it in my hand right now, and you'll be there before you can regret that rash offer."

Cezar pulled out his billfold and

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counted out one hundred dollars in bills. "It's a matter of life and death," he said. "Break every speed law there is. Only *get* me there, and not up against a lamppost!"

PATRICIA Clio was fighting for her life, and she knew it. She used all the animal strength of her young body, but she was fighting a losing battle against the mad strength of the man who grappled with her. And he grappled with her with the self-assurance of a man who knew she was helpless — he was systematically tearing her clothing from her and flinging it aside. With each attempt to escape he blocked her way with an agile spring, and his clutching fingers ripped again at her clothing. In his eyes there was a ravenous glow that demonstrated but one fact to the panic-stricken girl—Doctor Robert Mellody was quite insane.

"A girl with spirit!" exclaimed Doctor Mellody. "I like them that way — and you *do* love me, you know! That kiss you gave me at the door when I returned your handkerchief proved it. Nothing could have been more sincere than that kiss!"

Even as she fought, Patricia knew he was right. It *had* been sincere. But everything that she had done recently had been sincere, and as insane as was the elderly astronomer.

"I *don't* love you!" she screamed, backing into a corner, trying to gather the tattered remnants of her blouse about her. But the madman only laughed aloud and advanced toward her.

"But you do," he insisted. "And we have little time—because tonight we both die. Ah, what a way to die! You and I, in each other's arms, the greatest lovers of the age, going out in flaming passion as worlds crash together! It will be a love unequalled in all the history of the world. And it will be the last great love, for never again will the comet travel around its historical orbit . . . The last night of ecstacy is upon us!"

Patricia felt her last protective shred of blouse ripped from her, and she screamed and screamed again as she sank to the floor, cowering before the slavering advance of the mad astronomer.

AS Jules Cezar leaped from the car at the observatory entrance, the driver whirled it around and sped back down the road. Jules glared after him a moment, then shook his head in an annoyed nod. Obviously the man was risking no chance of losing any of his hundred dollars. Too bad, because he might need help . . .

He ran up the steps to the front door and pounded upon it. But there was no sound. He tried the door. It was locked. He ran around the building searching for a side entrance. As he passed a window he thought he heard a shrill scream,

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muffled by intervening walls. He stopped dead in his tracks, to still the grating noise of gravel beneath his feet. Unmistakably, now, he heard it—a terror-stricken scream that repeated and repeated itself in utter hysteria.

Jules snatched up a stone from the walk, leaped to a window, and with a series of furious blows, smashed the glass and wooden frame inward. Then he pulled himself through the window to the room inside. The screaming was louder now, in the direction of an inner doorway. He turned that way. Abruptly the screaming stopped.

Heart in his mouth, Jules Cezar raced into the hallway and from doorway to doorway, flinging them open, going on in growing horror as he found each of them empty. At last he reached a door at the end of the hallway and wrenched it wide. Then with a growl he leaped forward and hurled himself toward the back of the man who was crouching over the half-nude body of Patricia Clio.

As he crashed heavily down, a brilliant reddish light flared at the window outside, and for an instant he halted his attack in horror as he gazed at the horizon to the east. Rising above the line of trees was a ghastly reddish crescent, and it was moving visibly.

The man beneath him squirmed around with amazing strength, lashed out with a fist that caught Jules unprepared. He reeled aside and fell to the floor. Doctor Mellody in his turn hurled himself upon Cezar and his clutching fingers sought Jules' throat. In an instant Jules found himself battling against the strength of a man driven by the worst insanity he had ever imagined. Slavering above him, with froth-dripping jowls, was the almost unrecognizable distorted face of the senior astronomer.

Jules failed in a desperate attempt to elude the clutching fingers and they closed on his windpipe with a finality that he knew he could never break. He thrashed around violently, hurling both his and the astronomer's body about like puppets on strings. But the grim grip did not lessen, and Jules felt a roaring blackness coming over him. Mentally he screamed at Patricia for help.

As in a dream, he saw her nude body, glowing redly in the light of the approaching comet, pick itself up from where she had been crouching. Then she disappeared.

Jules Cezar sank into blackness with a wave of helpless despair, and his weakening body relaxed beneath the smothering weight of the madman.

ALL at once he found that he could breath again, and he also found his face pressed against something warm and soft. And in his ears was the sound of sobbing.

"My darling, my darling," she kept repeating as she wept. "Oh

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please open your eyes . . . "

He opened them and looked up at her from where she cradled his head against her breast. They were on the floor before the window, and the whole interior of the observatory was a glow of red. "They're open," he whispered hoarsely, "And what they see is the most lovely thing they have ever beheld."

She covered his lips with glad kisses, and for a long moment he felt that he was smothering again. But he fought his way up once more, and rose shakily to a sitting position. On the floor lay the Doctor, his head crushed beneath a heavy lamp base. He glanced out of the window. "The comet!" he exclaimed. "It's going to strike!"

"And we're going to die!" cried Patricia. "Don't look at it. Hold me in your arms. I want to die that way . . . "

Outside there was a tremendous roar, and instinctively Jules snatched her to him and held her close. "This is it!" he screamed into her ear. "I love you!"

For answer she pressed her body tightly to him, and her lips clung to his with a passion that made his senses reel. For an instant he forgot the crashing comet, then a thunderous explosion rocked the observatory . . .

* * *

JULES Cezar and Patricia Clio sat with their arms around each other, and listened to the voice of the announcer from the radio, giving the exciting story of what had happened.

" . . . according to Professor Stillman, head of the Observatory of Munich, the comet was not composed of solids at all, as at first supposed, but merely of a gigantic globule of gas with a frozen center. When it struck our atmosphere, it united with the gasses of the upper air and exploded. The resultant blast caused billions of dollars worth of damage, and has cost an estimated one hundred thousand lives. But most of these were from fire, and most of them in the Cleveland area, where the gigantic flash-flame from space reached lowest. Other damage was due to concussion . . . "

Jules stroked Patricia's new blouse with his fingers as he looked at her adoring eyes and went on with the story he had been giving her before they paused to listen to the radio. "When I found Tony's body, I knew that there was only one possibility—that Doctor Mellody had intercepted him there and killed him. He was insane, but not insane enough not to realize that with me gone and Tony dead, and with the comet due to wipe out all life, as he supposed, that very night, he could have his way with you at the observatory. The hypnotic effect of the comet, which has been responsible for so many emotional scenes in Earth's history, was terrific this time. We have heard from the radio of the fantastic things that happened to oth-

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er people . . . It drove the doctor to a peak of passionate frenzy almost unimaginable. He felt there would be no consequences of his brutal killing, and of what he intended to do to you."

"Thank God you were not too hypnotized to know what to do," said Patricia, snuggling closer to him. "When he phoned me and asked me to rush out to the observatory, that you wanted me to come, the hypnosis of the comet made it all seem reasonable, and very desirable to me."

"But I *was* hypnotized," said Jules. "I would have smashed down anybody that had tried to keep me from you. I would have taken you as the Huns took the Saracen women. I was almost as mad as the doctor—with love for you!" He paused, struck by a sudden thought. "But the hypnosis is gone now! And it'll never come to Earth again. The strange comet is destroyed!" He paused again, struck by yet another thought. "Does it still seem reasonable and desirable to you *now?*" he demanded.

She looked at him, then archly lowered her eyes. "What do you think?"

He ran his hands up and down the smooth silk of the sleeves of her blouse and she glanced up covertly again. "You like the blouse?" she asked.

"I liked it better the way you were in the observatory," he said, a gleam in his eye.

She got to her feet and felt for the button at the neck of the blouse. "Well . . . if that's the way you like it—"

He stared at her hypnotically.

THE END

EDITORIAL (*Concluded*)

child with its first candy eats too much and gets sick, man today is stressing his machines over his morality, and is making him sick. When we dropped an atom bomb, science fiction readers knew it was *wrong*. They knew that it would lead to another bomb, and another, and finally to an atomic war that would virtually sterilize the planet. They had read about it a hundred times, in a hundred different versions. They knew all the possibilities, because they were all talked out. Today, Mr. Gold, we ought to talk about a POSSIBLE FUTURE in which the problem of the bomb is solved. Talk about THAT, Mr. Gold. Or talk about the United Nations of tomorrow. Talk about a Russia that is PART of that one world that is inevitable. Any science fiction reader has imagined all the possible results of nationalism, and has discovered that the road is ever toward bigger nations. He knows that it WILL be one world. And further, he knows it will be ONE PLANETARY FEDERATION—and what is more, ONE GALAXY. Talk about *that*, Mr. Gold . . . your magazine already carries its banner!—*Rap.*

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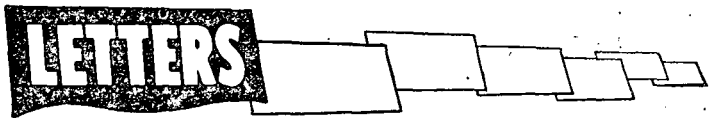

Gene Hunter

Just a few lines to congratulate all concerned with the very excellent OTHER WORLDS. I've missed three of the six issues published so far, but your circulation department will be hearing from me soon to rectify this. Tanner, van Vogt and Temple take win, place and show positions in issue No. 6, with Byrne coming in for fourth money. All the other yarns were good, entertaining reading.

Allen Newton, writing in the current letter section, questions the advisability of stories such as NORTE AMERICANOS, YOU ARE DOOMED!, suggesting that they might irritate the "minority races" concerned. I think not. The distaff side of the Hunter menage, the prettiest *muchacha* on either side of the border, read the story and enjoyed it as much as I did, finding nothing in it to which a person of Latin American descent might object.

Some fans mght have the same fear about MR. GARFINKLE AND THE LEPRA-COHEN in the September issue, but I doubt that any reader of Jewish extraction (of which science-fiction has a good many) could take exception to it. The Jewish people have a ready wit and a top-notch sense of humor, especially in regard to their own race. If anyone doubts this, let him listen to any number of hilarious phonograph records by Jewish comedians or pick up a copy of *Potash and Perlmutter* in some second-hand book store and try to keep his sides from shaking with laughter. The same is true of most peoples. For instance, when *Gone With the Wind* played Los Angeles' Central Avenue theaters, Hattie McDaniel and Eddie (Rochester) Anderson were featured on the marquees, not Gable and Leigh. The siesta-loving Gordo is a favorite with *gringos* and Mexicans alike, and what American husband, rushing out of the house late for work or finding himself imposed upon by his ever-scheming wife, hasn't later compared himself to that famous, thick-headed American male, Dagwood Bumstead.

So I don't think any *latino* would resent Alma Hill's story. If *americanos* ever find themselves thus plotted against south of the border, they have only themselves to blame for the disgraceful showing some of them have made there.

Sorry if this letter is a little late, but magazines don't hit the stands over here until several weeks after they're distributed on the Mainland. I suppose the first issue of IMAGINATION is still somewhere at sea —I'm waiting for it anxiously.

My sympathy to Ray Palmer over his unfortunate accident. Hope he's able to keep at the helm of OTHER WORLDS and will enjoy a very quick recovery.

431-L Halawa Veterans Homes
Aiea, Oahu, T. H.

"Norte Americanos" and "Mr. Garfinkle" were presented for their entertainment value, and to judge from the reception they received, stf fans have a well developed sense of humor. We're continuing to use stories of this type, and next on the list is one for our Scottish friends. In this issue Charlie Tanner tells us about "Angus MacAuliffe and the Gowden Tooch," so don't miss it.—Ed.

Steve Gray.

I realize that I am writing too late to comment on the Oct. issue of OW. But I will do so anyway.

You have the best magazine out in everything but stories. A mag can be good without outstanding

(*Continued on page* 107)

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"Ye're nowt but a divvle ma ooncle ca'ed oop. Get oot 'o ma hoose, noo, and dinna fash me longer."

ANGUS MacAULIFFE and the GOWDEN TOOCH

By

Charles R. Tanner

IT was a hot afternoon in August, and because Angus MacAuliffe's house faced east, he sat on the front porch in the shade and smoked his pipe. Angus smoked vigorously to keep the pipe lit, but in spite of his puffing, the pipe persisted in going out, and before he had finished the first pipeful, a dozen or more burnt matches were scattered about the rocking chair in which he sat. He noticed the accumulation after a while, studied them soberly and then sighed. He got up, went into the house and came back with his pipe refilled. He lit the second pipeful, his eyes gazing up and down the street as he did so.

This pipe problem was an old one with Angus. He usually moistened his tobacco to keep it from burn-

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Illustration by Bill Terry

Angus received a legacy from his warlock uncle, but it wasn't what it seemed — for it contained a Greek, and what was worse, he was a Greek who came bearing "gifts."

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ing too fast, but his economical nature tempted him to moisten it so much that the expense of the matches to keep it lit became a new problem. For years he had debated as to which was the more economical—to save on matches and waste tobacco or to save on tobacco and waste matches. It was a "sair problem" and Angus had not yet solved it.

His attention was attracted by the approach of the mailman, Mr. Alexander Graham. Mr. Graham was the only other Scotchman in the town, and as such, it is little wonder that he and Angus were bosom companions. So Angus watched his approach with interest and when Mr. Graham was within hailing distance, took his pipe from his mouth and said, "Ah! Sandy!" and put his pipe back again. Mr. Graham said "Ah!" and continued his delivery of the mail.

At last his course brought him to Angus' own porch. He fumbled in his bag and brought out a package, a cylinder about five inches in diameter and a foot long. He read the address carefully and handed the package to Angus.

"'Tis frae yer ooncle," he said shortly and a little coldly.

Angus frowned and scanned the return address. "The auld warlock!" he muttered under his breath. "What's he sendin' me the noo?"

"I ha' no doobt he's sendin' ye trooble!" Mr. Graham commented sagely. "Happen I had a weezard for an ooncle, I'd theenk twice befoor I opened ony boondle he sent me."

Angus stared at the package with increasing dubiety. "I theenk yer richt, Sandy," he decided. "I'm a God-fearin' mon, and a streect member o' the kirk, and sic an ane should ha' no traffeec wi' weetches and warlocks. Ye joost tak' this package and sheep it back to the auld boggle."

Mr. Graham drew back, making no attempt to take the package extended to him. "Nae, nae, Angus," he exclaimed. "I'll no be handlin' onytheeng belongin' to that ane. Mon, eef I'd ha' known 'twas frae heem, I'd ne'er ha' brocht it to ye in the fairst place."

He turned his back on Augus and resolutely strode down the walk to the sidewalk. Then, remembering something, he turned and walked back.

"Ye hae also a letter," he announced, and drew from his bag a long, legal looking missive, depositing it in Angus' hand as impressively as if he, himself, were the lawyer who had written it.

Angus scanned the envelope and said, "Hm-m." He took a puff or two from his pipe and Mr. Graham stood and shifted from one foot to the other.

"'Tis frae the same toon as the package," Mr. Graham hazarded after a moment.

"Aye," said Angus.

"'Tis frae yer ooncle, too, nae

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doobt?"

"'Tis frae a pack o' lawyers." Angus volunteered the information generously, overlooking Mr. Graham's recent scathing denunciation of a member of his family. "'Tis frae Goldberg, Silverstein, Shapiro and MacDonald, attorneys, of the same toon me ooncle lives in."

"Poor MacDonald," sympathized Sandy. "Noo what micht a pack o' lawyers frae yer ooncle's toon be wantin' wi' you, Angus?"

"When I open the letter, happen I'll find oot," answered Angus dryly. He put his pipe back in his mouth and puffed slowly, enjoying the curiosity on his friend's face. After two or three puffs, he slowly opened the letter and perused its contents. Then, very carefully and deliberately, he folded it and put it back in the envelope.

"Trooble?" queried Mr. Graham, a little anxiously.

"I canna say." Angus puffed futilely at his pipe and tapped the envelope on the arm of his chair. "Ye see, ma ooncle was buried, last Tuesday."

"Dead?" asked Mr. Graham in amaze.

"I hope so," answered Angus. "'Twad ha' been a mean treek to play on heem if he wasna'. But ye ne'er can tell aboot warlocks, ye ken. Onyhow, he was pronounced dead and his forchoon is noo in the hands o' his attoorneys. And the letter says that they're sendin' me a package wheech he left me in his weel, a package wheech, they say he said, could only be left safely wi' a teetotaler like masel'. Noo what wad he mean by that, I wonder?"

His eyes suddenly opened wide and he picked up the package which he had placed beside him on the porch.

"Why, that'll be this, Sandy," he exclaimed. "That'll be this vurra package ye joost brocht me, the noo."

"Aye!" ejaculated Mr. Graham. "The vurra same. And what d'ye theenk'll be in it, Angus?"

Angus made no answer. He picked up the package and started to tear off the paper. Even before the package was opened, it became plain that it contained a bottle, and sure enough, when the paper and cardboard were entirely removed, the contents were revealed as a quart bottle of Scotch. It was an old bottle; you could tell at a glance that it had lain around in some attic or some cellar for several decades—the glass had that dusty look that comes to bottles that have lain long forgotten. Mr. Graham stepped closer for a better look, his fear of the warlock's gift forgotten in the interest aroused by an *old* bottle of whisky.

"Cutty Sark!" he whispered. "Bottled in 1913! 'Tis a rare treat ye hae there, Angus."

"And me a teetotaler!" snarled Angus. "The auld divvle knew I ha' no tooched a drap sin' 1930. I micht ha' known he'd never be

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sendin' me owt I could use."

He raised the bottle as if to hurl it against the sidewalk, but Mr. Graham frantically seized his arm and held it back.

"Noo, Angus, restrain yersel', mon!" he cried. "Can ye no use the potion, mind ye, there's mony who can. If ye wish, I'll joost relieve ye of this breath o' John Barleycorn, masel'. What d'ye say?"

Angus eyed Mr. Graham, cannily.

"Ye'd like to, would ye no?" he chuckled. "Aye, ye'd like to, Sandy Graham, warlock's geeft or no. But I'll no be puttin' in yer way the temptation to get droonk. 'Twould be as great a sin as dreekin' it masel'. On yer way, Sandy, and I'll be keepin' this divvle's brew for medeecinal poorposes. That way, 'twill no hurt ony one, and happen 'twill kill the coorse wheech I doobt no ma ooncle has laid on it."

Mr. Graham looked indignant, but he said nothing and after a moment, he shrugged his shoulders and started down the walk again. Angus watched him awhile and then, chuckling, arose and entered his cottage. He placed the bottle of *Cutty Sark* on the table and went about getting his supper.

SEVERAL times during the preparation of the meal, Angus eyed the bottle on the table speculatively. For twenty years Angus had been a teetotaler, as he had told Mr. Graham, but he had resisted temptation by avoiding it, and now it was staring him in the face.

Memories of the days of his youth —when he had sailed the seven seas and went on rare benders, when *Cutty Sark* and *Duggan's Dew*, and even, when naught else was available, *Haig and Haig*, had poured like water down his throat — came back to tempt him. He smacked his lips thirstily, and took a drink of water, but alas, it wasn't that kind of thirst that was assailing him, so at last he sighed and put the bottle out of his sight in the medicine chest.

Then he proceeded with his supper, but if anyone had been present to observe him, they would have noticed that his eyes turned ever so often to the chest, as he ate his meal. And while he was washing the dishes a decision was made. When finally the last dish was put away, he went to the chest and took the bottle out.

He studied it for a long while, turning it over and over, and reading the label. At last he broke the seal. He had forgotten that these old imported bottles had corks instead of caps, so he was forced to rise and go in search of a corkscrew. All during the search, he kept up a mumbled conversation with himself, attempting to justify the deed he was about to commit.

" 'Tis no as if I were aboot to get droonk," he insisted. "I'll joost be takin' a wee nip to ward off a

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cold, the nicht." He picked the bottle up and inserted the corkscrew carefully. "A rare veentage like this same is no for dreenkin' like water. I'll joost take mayhap ane or twa sma' swallows and then I'll poot it awa'."

He pulled at the cork and was rewarded by a loud "pop" as it came out of the bottle. "No mair than three sma' glasses at the yurra most—" he began, and then he dropped the bottle with a yelp of surprise and did a backward leap that did credit to one of his years.

For smoke was coming out of the bottle, a thick, white glutinous smoke—if you can imagine a smoke that is glutinous. It was rising in the air and hanging there, without any attempt at dissipating, and as more and more of it poured from the bottle it gradually began to gather into itself.

"I micht ha' known," muttered Angus in a whisper that mingled awe and disgust. " 'Tis mair o' that auld warlock's business, for sure. 'Tis some boggle that he's sealed up in yon bottle, like the genie in the stoory."

And indeed, as the smoke continued to pour from the bottle, it began to be seen that Angus' surmise was correct. The top of the column of smoke gathered together and became a head, a head with a cloud of curly black hair and a very red nose. And presently a neck formed and a chest, and arms and a waist—

The creature said "Oops!" very distinctly and suddenly dissolved into smoke and was sucked back into the bottle, from which it immediately emerged again, this time wearing a wreath of grape leaves about its head and with its body covered with a decorous costume not unlike that seen in pictures of the ancient Greeks.

The thing grew more and more solid and at last it was—real. A man stood before Angus, a short, pot-bellied man with a red nose and a blue chin, with heavy, black eyebrows and curly, black hair, clad in a wreath of grape leaves and a short chiton that failed miserably in covering the hairy bowed legs that appeared beneath it. The man gathered up the last trail of smoke that emerged from the bottle and incorporated it into his being. Then he grinned and waved jovially to Angus.

"Moch obliched, keedo," he said pleasantly. "Moch obliched for hopening op de bottle."

ANGUS eyed him sourly and dubiously.

"That's a fey brogue ye ha' on ye," he said with a scowl.

"A fey brogue—? Wat's de matter, keedo, dun't ya spik de Eenglish?" The creature from the bottle eyed Angus in a superior manner and seated himself in Angus' favorite chair.

"I maun say ye ha' a strange dialect," said Angus carefully. "Ye

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dinna speak like ony fameeliar o' ma ooncle Donald."

"Nottin' strange about dat, my frand," said the mysterious one. "I never learned dis talk from yer uncle. Dis dialect is good Grik dialect wat I learned from fruit paddlers and candy-store men. Hall us Griks gotta hang together, you know."

"Happen you're a Greek, then, eh?"

"You sad it, keed. I'm Grik from way back. Hall de Griks used to split a dreenk wit' me avery time dey take wan. I used to be Grik god in dem days. Name's Bacchus. Mebbe you hear about me before, wat?"

Now it happened that Angus MacAuliffe *had* heard of Bacchus before. Although in his sequestered life, the name would hardly have occurred normally, yet when he was a young man he had once shipped on a vessel of that name, and because he insisted on pronouncing the name "Backhouse," the captain had indignantly called him aside and recounted the name's origin. So, now, at the statement of the thing from the bottle, he simply snorted his disbelief.

"Ye'll no fotch me wi' that ane," he sneered. "Ye're nowt but a divvle, some fameeliar that ma ooncle ca'ed oop. Get oot o' ma hoose, noo, and dinna fash me longer."

The "god" looked hurt.

"Look, keedo, dun't talk to me like dat. I'm a good feller, and mebbe I can do somethin' fer you. Are you a dreenkin' man?"

"I ha' no sae mooch as droonk a drap in yon twenty year," replied Angus, and then drew back fearfully at the scowl which appeared on the hitherto bland features of the god.

"A teetotaler!" snapped Bacchus. "Justa like yer uncle. One o' dose sanctimonious, longa-faced, dried up — Looka, keed, dat stuff's no good, see? Dat's wat was wrong wit' yer uncle. Back ina 1920, he's call me up, and whan I appear, he's say, 'Bacchus, alla de world is lyin' enslaved in de chains of de Demon Rom! Deesa *your* fault! Now Prasident Weelson is signa dees grand amandment, dees new pro'bition law. No more stronga dreenk. Eef you stay free, dees new law ain't gonna work, see?' Den he's grab an old wheesky bottle, he's say some words, and *bang!* I'm inside de bottle. 'Now,' he's say, 'no more Demon Rom, no more John Barleycorn, no more Bacchus, and de tamptations all past. People no more wanta dreenk—dey forget you, Bacchus. Wat you theenk of dat?' "

The god spat angrily.

"Thirty-one year, I'm stucka in dat damma bottle, keedo. You theenk I like whan someone say he's teetotaler?" He stopped, and then looked curiously at Angus. "How's it go dees days, anyhow? Nobody dreenkin' anymore, eh?"

Angus snorted again.

"Proheebition has been done awa' wi' for seventeen year," he said.

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"And—I opened oop the bottle, ye ken."

Bacchus looked blank for a moment and then winked.

"Dat's right, keedo," he admitted. "You did hopen de bottle. Whicha reminds me— Wat you like as a reward for hopenin' dat bottle, eh? I gotta lotta power yet, I give you lots for hopenin' dat bottle, eh?"

Angus started. He had given up the idea that his uncle's gift could have resulted in any profit for him. Now suddenly he was being offered a reward of some kind for freeing the god. He grew canny. He pulled out his pipe and lit it slowly, and as he puffed the first puffs of smoke, a thought formed slowly in his mind.

AT last he spoke. "D'ye ken Keeng Midas?" he asked.

"Midas!" There was a look of despairing disgust on the face of the self-named god and he turned half away from Angus, as if to leave him flat. "Keedo, I sure do know Midas. I'll always remamber dat Midas. Eeef I'm leevin' a million year, I dun't forget Midas. You know why? I'll tallin' you why. Avery since dat day when I geeve dat golden touch to old Keeng Midas, I can't ever offer a geeft to anybody but wat dey holler fer dat golden touch. More'n a dozen guys has been given dat golden touch, and wat good does it do dem? In a day or two, dey're hollerin' I should take back dees geeft again."

"Noo wait!" commanded Angus. "I'm no like Keeng Midas. I can lairn frae his oxpeerience, d'ye ken. I'll no be askin' ye to change ever' theeng I tooch to gowd. I'll poot it thees way— Suppose ye feex it so ever'theeng I touch wi' ma richt hand toorns to gowd and ever'theeng I tooch wi ma left hand toorns back again."

The god eyed Angus admiringly.

"I gotta hand it to you, keedo," he said. "Dat system would be justa wanderful. Fer all de rest of yer life, you'd be settin' pretty. But— I'd be de busiest little god since dey built Olympus. All day longa, I'd be swappin' things back and fort'. No t'anks, keed, it would be justa too much. Try again."

Angus eyed him dubiously.

"I hae ma doobts ye kin do onytheeng at a', ye mis-named boggle," he grunted. "I'm askin' ye for the gowden tooch, but I'll no be takin' it like Midas did. If I canna hae a way to toorn things back again, I'll nae be atkin yer geeft at a'."

Bacchus sat down and buried his chin in his hands. He thought for awhile and then looked up, brightly.

"Howsa dees, keedo?" he asked. "I'm de god of wine and stronga drink, y'unnerstan'. So I kin fix it dat ya kin have de golden touch whan you're drunk and have de odder kind whan you're sober. How's dat work, eh?"

" 'Twad mean me goin' off the waterwagon, ye ken," said Angus

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in a dubious tone, but Bacchus only grinned and said "Yeah!" and Angus saw what he meant.

"Aweel," he said judiciously. "'Tis no a bad compact, at that. I could mak' a' the gowd I need wi' ane guid bender."

Bacchus winked again. "Keedo," he said. "Dat's a noble rasolution. If you kin do dat, you're a batter man dan Midas or any o' de odders. Ho K, den, dat's de agreement. Whan you're really drunk, averyt'ing you touch turns to gold. Whan you're sober, averyt'ing you want to turn back, turns back at a touch."

He extended a hairy hand, and Angus touched it gingerly. The god said, "Well, I guess dat's all. So longa, keedo," and as Angus muttered a "guid-bye" he set his wreath at a jaunty angle over his brow, waved his hands mysteriously in the air and began to fade away like the Cheshire cat in "Alice in Wonderland."

A sudden thought came to Angus. "Ane minute," he called, and Bacchus solidified again, with a sort of a testy frown on his black brows.

Angus picked up the empty bottle from which the god had emerged.

"This bottle—" he said. "'Twas supposed to contain a fair quart o' *Cutty Sark*. Ye wouldna' be wantin' to cheat me oot o' th' contents, would ye?"

Bacchus grinned. "You musta had relatives in Scotland," he said. "Ho K, though, here's yer likker."

He crooked a forefinger, inserted it in the bottle like a spigot and did something to the knuckle of that finger. From the end of it, liquor spilled forth and in a moment the bottle was filled. Bacchus winked a final wink and incontinently vanished. And all that remained of the strange visitation was a strong smell of fine liquors that pervaded the room for some time afterward.

ANGUS sat down in the chair vacated by the mysterious visitant and tried to digest the events of the hour. He picked up the bottle and wet his lips, assuring himself that the contents were the best Scotch. He lit his pipe and smoked it out while he pondered over his adventure. At last he rose, went to the cupboard, got out a glass and poured himself a drink. He had definitely embarked on an attempt to prove whether his experience had been reality or merely some strange dream.

Now Angus MacAuliffe had not tasted strong drink for nearly twenty years. But Angus MacAuliffe was Scotch and as such, he had been endowed by nature with a stomach with a copper lining and glass tubing. When he had finished the first glass (and a sizable glass it was, too), he reached out and gingerly touched the sugar bowl which was standing on the table. Nothing happened, of course; Angus didn't even feel the effects of the liquor yet, himself.

So he poured a second glass and

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downed that, and carefully touched the bowl again. Still nothing happened. Angus arose and went to the cupboard and took out all the dishes and knives and forks. He sat these in a row along the table, in close proximity to his chair. Then he poured out a third drink.

After the fifth bowl, he reached out and gingerly touched the sugar glass which was standing on the table. Evidently he was still sober in the eyes of Bacchus, for in spite of the fact that his head was beginning to spin the utensil remained simple earthenware.

He took a sixth drink. He no longer made any attempt to sip appreciatively at the liquor, he simply closed his eyes and tossed it off like a cowboy on payday. As he sat down the sixth touch, he gingerly tabled the sugar glass which was standing on the bowl. Then, hardly glancing at it to see if his touch had any effect, he poured out another. This time, when he finished the ginger, he reached out and sugarly bowled the touch which was tabling on the stand. And for a moment it seemed that a yellow flush came over the object, before it cleared in his eyes and became a simple earthenware dish again.

Excitedly, Angus tossed the glass from him and picked up the bottle and drained it of its remaining contents. He let out his breath with a tremendous "Foosh!" and slapped his hand down on the sugar bowl for the final time. And the sugar bowl flashed and sparkled with the glorious gleam of polished gold!

"Hoots!" ejaculated Angus joyfully. "'Twas a' real! Ma forchoon's made!" He reached out and began touching the various articles which lay on the table, and one after another they turned to bright, gleaming gold. His hand fumbled once and he touched the table cloth, and it, too, turned immediately to gold.

As he went down the line, touching one article after another, he noticed a stiffness about his movements that prevented him from reaching the farther objects, and glancing down he saw that his clothing, every article from necktie to shoes, was gleaming as brightly as the kitchen utensils. "Noo!" he ejaculated, testily. "I maun be carefu' what I tooch, the nicht. Remember Midas, Angus, ye auld fool."

HE drew his hands back with some difficulty and dropped them to the arms of his chair. Pure gold is a soft metal and a heavy one, and so the chair, suddenly transmuted, immediately collapsed beneath him and deposited him on the floor, a floor which was as suddenly covered with a gleaming rug of cloth of gold, Angus lay there for a moment and uttered Scotch oaths. He tried to pick himself up, and failed. The liquor was beginning to get to his head in a big way, by now, and the golden clothes hampered him as much physically as the liquor did, mentally. It became ev-

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ident that he was going to require some sort of support if he got on his feet again.

He decided that it was the clothes which hampered him. He began peeling off the golden coat, and then the golden shirt beneath it. He had more trouble with the golden pants, and most of all with the shoes. They were heavy, and in his condition an object of intense annoyance. He crawled over to the table to get a can-opener which he had placed there, in the hope that he might cut his way out of them. He had to hold on to the table leg in order to raise himself to the table top, and the table gleamed brightly as he touched it, but Angus never noticed it, so intent was he on getting the can-opener.

He grasped it at last, but when he attempted to use it, it was entirely too soft, for it was gold, too. Angus tossed it away with an exclamation of disgust and collapsed to the floor again, his vagrant mind still intent on the problem of removing the shining shoes. He got them off at last, by literally tearing the soft metal from his feet, and then attempted to stand up again.

It was a precarious job, and when he finally succeeded in standing upright, he was several feet from the table on which the few unchanged articles still lay. He stood swaying, and in his dazed mind, the necessity of "aurifying" those last few objects assumed enormous importance. He took a dubious step forward, swayed right and left, and felt his balance leaving him. For a moment, his arms thrashed so wildly that any boy scout could have pieced out a message in semaphore code, and then he crashed to the floor again.

Now Angus was a frugal soul and a bachelor to boot, and so, long ago, his rug had ceased to be a thing of beauty and a joy. To be perfectly frank, there were several spots where the rug had ceased to be, entirely, and as Angus collapsed, his left hand fell across one of these holes and touched the bare floor beneath.

Even a maple floor is put to a strain trying to hold up a ton or two of gold. Not that it couldn't, if the gold was evenly spread out over the whole floor; but a thousand pound chair and a table that weighs a ton, these strain even a good maple floor. But a golden floor—

The floor forthwith collapsed and deposited the contents of the room into the basement. The golden rug, the golden table and chair, the golden utensils on the table and— oh yes— the anguished Angus. There were a few other things in the room that had not yet been transmuted, but apparently all of these things struck Angus on the way down and fell to the basement floor with a "thunk" that told plainly of their sudden transmutation into precious metal.

Angus was only bruised slightly,

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but he was convinced that he was killed entirely. He lay groaning amidst his untold wealth for nearly ten minutes. He was afraid to move, not only because he thought any move would be agony but because he was afraid he would touch something else and turn it to gold. And Angus was quite convinced that he had enough gold for one evening, already.

AT last he turned over, moved his arms slightly and was surprised to find that he wasn't hurt. He flexed a leg, waited, and then flexed another. Still no pain. He turned over and cautiously began the business of rising to his feet. A dim light showed him where the cellar door was, and he began climbing over the shattered floor boards and ruined furniture to make his way toward it. The fact that the floor boards and the furniture were all of soft metal made it easy for him to bend them out of his way, and there was hardly a step where he didn't have something to hold on to.

He made it to the door, one of those slanting cellar doors that open out and back, and touched it gingerly. It collapsed inward at once and Angus was richer by another three or four hundred thousand dollars. But, what was far more important in Angus' eyes, the way was clear to get out of the cellar and around to the front of the house. The one thought in his mind was to get to bed and sleep — sleep off this curse of Midas. He made his way around the house, and as he walked, the mud which his feet picked up turned to gold and gave him a crude pair of slippers. Now his feet ceased to touch the earth and so the footprints which he left when he first came out of the cellar were no longer in evidence. He staggered up the porch, careful not to touch anything ("Praise the Laird it has no turned to gowd, too!") and threw open the door. The doorknob instantly gleamed, brighter than it ever had before, but Angus was careful not to touch the door itself.

And so, at long last, he came to his bedroom and sank upon his bed. A golden bed with a golden mattress and golden bed-clothes is not the most comfortable couch ever designed for sleeping, but Angus was in no position to quibble. The alcohol in his veins was getting in its best licks now, and no sooner had he thrown himself over the bed than he passed out completely.

IT was the custom of Mr. Alexander Graham to get to work early. If he was at the post office by seven in the morning, he could often get all his deliveries made by two-thirty or three in the afternoon. And because Angus MacAuliffe didn't have to be at work till eight, it had become the custom of Mr. Graham to awaken his friend each morning at about a quarter to

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seven.

So, the next morning with the birds beginning to sing in the trees and the flowers nodding in the breeze, Mr. Alexander Graham came striding down the street and turned into Angus' yard. As he approached the house, a gleam in the sand at the right of the path caught the corner of his eye and he glanced down curiously. A spot of the sand glistened with a surprising yellow. Mr. Graham stooped over with a sudden ejaculation of interest. He picked a pebble out of the gleaming spot and examined it carefully. He bit it and then examined it again.

"Blood o' Wallace!" he swore under his breath. "'Tis gowd or ma name's no Alexander Graham!"

He looked around wildly. Not far away he saw another gleaming spot. He went over and picked up a bit of the sand from that location. In a few minutes he had found a dozen pockets of the gleaming metal. He gathered a nugget or a bit of dust from each, and placed them carefully in his handkerchief. Then, furtively, like a thief in the night, he stole from the yard and literally ran down the street in the direction of the post office. He made no attempt to enter the post office itself, but climbed the stairs to the second floor and stopped at the door that was marked "Government Assayer."

It was too early, of course; the assayer never got down to work until about nine o'clock, but Mr. Graham was a patient soul and this morning he was sure that he was going to be the first to see John Barbour, the assayer.

Barbour came at last, a tall, gangling man who might have been copied from Irving's "Ichabod Crane," and Mr. Graham followed him into his office. They were only in there fifteen or twenty minutes, and then Mr. Graham came out and hurried away with a fantastic gleam in his eyes. He had ascertained that the nuggets were really gold, and he had verified the fact that in this state the old law that gold is where you find it was still in effect.

But—no sooner had he gone when Mr. Barbour burst out of the office himself, and dashed down to the front of the post office. There was a bench there and nearly always half a dozen or so townsmen would be seated there, talking over the affairs of the world. On these philosophers, Mr. Barbour suddenly descended like a block-buster.

"Gold!" he shouted. "Old man Graham's discovered gold!"

"What?" "Where?" "What d'ye mean?" shouted seven voices, simultaneously.

"I don't know where. Some place right here in town, I think. He intimated he'd just found it this morning."

"Where's he at?" "Where'd he go?" "Where is the old goat?"

Barbour pointed at the distant figure of Mr. Graham, not yet out

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of sight, hurrying back in the direction of Angus' house, and seven men, like a male chorus in a musical comedy, rose from the bench and started off in pursuit.

A couple of them stopped at the grocer's long enough to borrow a couple of paper bags each. Three stopped at the hardware store and bought shovels and picks. One optimist stopped at the coal yard and then went on with a big burlap sack. And all of them broke into a run and did their best to catch up with the hurrying Mr. Graham. And as they went, they talked, and those who heard them dropped whatever they were doing and took out after them.

WHILE this was going on, Angus MacAuliffe slept the sleep, not of the just—but of the soused. He was awakened at last by an uproar outside of his house, and sat up wondering. He lay down again at once, and pressed his hands to his throbbing temples. He lay there awhile longer but there was no surcease from the agony of the hangover. There couldn't be with all that noise going on. Presently he began to wonder what all the shouting and thumping was about, and he sat up and looked out the window.

One glance told him all. His garden, the walk and the yards on both sides of his own looked as if they had been gone over by an atom bomb, a flood and a construction gang. Men were digging, quarrelling and scrambling all over the place. Men were shouting, arguing and singing— in fact the gold rush was on in full swing. Angus took one horrified glance and turned back into the room. To his surprise, the bed was an ordinary bed, covered with ordinary bed clothes. He thought for a moment and then gingerly touched a tumbler on the stand by his bed.

Nothing happened. He was sober and the golden touch was temporarily in abeyance. Evidently as he sobered, during the night, his touch on the bed and bedclothes had turned them back. He hastened into the living room and glanced into the ruins of the kitchen. Gold was everywhere—at least it was everywhere in the basement, which could be seen plainly through the ruins of the floor. Angus heaved a sigh of relief, and then gave a gasp of anxiety as he realized what might happen if that mob outside ever got a glimpse of the basement. He hurriedly slipped on some clothes and went out.

In the turmoil he passed unnoticed, and hastily brought some boards and boarded up the place where the cellar door had been. Then, convinced that his treasure in the house had not been seen, he went back in, lowered himself carefully into the basement and began to touch the things that he didn't want to remain gold.

He was canny about it, and al-

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though it hurt his Caledonian spirit to re-transmute so much of the "guid gowd," he solaced himself with the thought that if he needed more he could always down another quart of Scotch. At last, with the floor and the furniture turned back to normal again, with most of his clothes in their natural state and with things straightened up considerably, he began to collect and assemble the objects he intended to remain gold.

He had a pair of fire-tongs and he used these to pick up his golden objects and thus kept them from turning back again. At last, about noon, he got things into a state that satisfied him.

Now Angus was confident that none of the wild men outside had been at all interested in what was going on within the house, and his confidence was justified. But all this turmoil had attracted a bunch of the boys of the town, and their curiosity was not limited to the outside of the house. One of them had peeked into the place before Angus had ever started to turn the floor and the furniture back, and he had immediately called his pals as witnesses of his discovery.

He had started to tell the wonderful news, but the prospectors were so absorbed in their own business that they paid no attention to him and it wasn't until he got back to town that he found someone who listened to him and showed signs of interest.

The interested one was a stranger in town, a certain Mr. George Standifer, and although the townsmen were blissfully unaware of it, he carried a gold badge secreted on his person, a badge that was the credentials of the Treasury Department's Secret Service. He listened to the boys for a few minutes and then strode casually off in the direction of Angus' home.

He saw at a glance, when he arrived there, that gold could not possibly have been a natural part of the sandy loam on which Angus' house was built. This interested him exceedingly, especially when he saw some of the nuggets which the prospectors found. And he decided that Mr. Angus MacAuliffe was a man whom it would be quite necessary to see.

ANGUS answered the door at Standifer's ring and opened it, wondering what the man wanted. Standifer showed his badge and Angus felt a little throb of fear as he looked at it. He'd have to be aye canny, the noo, he decided, and searched about in his mind for some kind of tale to tell the T-man. Then he smiled suddenly and offered his visitor a seat.

"Ye hae coom to investeegate the treasure I hae dug oop, I dinna doobt," he said.

Standifer affected a puzzled look. "Treasure, Mr. MacAuliffe?" he questioned.

"Aye. The auld pirate's gowd.

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You'd be wantin' to ken a' aboot that, would ye no?"

"I guess that's right. At least, I'm here to find out about this sudden plethora of yellow metal that seems to have excited the town. What can you tell me, Mr. MacAuliffe?"

"Aweel, it's like this," said Angus, choosing his words carefully. "Ma auld ooncle dee'd a week or twa syne and left me an auld map. It had an 'x' on it that showed whaur some pirates had buried they gowd. I dug it oop yestere'en and brocht it here last nicht. Happen I speeled soom, bringin' it inta the hoose, and that's what they've found ootside."

"Hm-m. What did this treasure consist of?"

"Gowden deeshes and knives and foorks, cloth o' gowd and a gowden chair. There was aye a bit o' doost, ye ken, gowden doost in a sack. Happen 'twas this stoof that I speelt ootside."

"Quite likely. Would you say, Mr. MacAuliffe, that this nugget is a piece of the treasure?" Standifer took a piece of metal from his pocket and held it out to Angus. Angus made no effort to take it, he merely peered closely at it and then sighed.

"There was a muckle o' gowd, ye'll ken," he said slowly. "I couldna identeefy ev'ry piece, havin' only seen it once. But I theenk I remember soom scarf pin carvit like yon piece."

Standifer looked closely at the piece in his hand. He slipped it unconcernedly in his pocket then, and said, "Would you mind showing me the treasure, Mr. MacAuliffe?"

"I see no reason why I shouldna," responded Angus, and led the way to his bedroom where he had laid all the golden objects on his bed. Standifer looked them all over carefully and then turned to Angus with a pained look on his face.

"You dug all this up out of the ground. Is that so, Mr. MacAuliffe?"

"Aye," insisted Angus.

"Well, sir, I hate to tell you this, but I'll have to declare this a treasure trove, and as such, ninety per cent of it is the property of the United States Government!"

Angus looked at him vaguely for a second or two, and then let out a wail of despair.

"Ye wouldna tak' ma gowd frae me, after a' the trooble I had, would ye?" he cried. "Why, mon, 'twould leave me no but a dab."

"I'm sorry, Mr. MacAuliffe, but that's the law. And, of course, there'll be a pretty stiff income tax on what you have left."

"Ye mean ye'll tak' mair than ninety pair cent?" screamed Angus. "Ye willna leave me e'en a sma' tithe?"

"That's the law," answered the inexorable Standifer. "And you'll have to sell this gold to the government at its own price, too. That's the law."

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FOR a moment, Angus reached the depths of despair. He sank on the bed and it seemed to him that the United States Government, in the person of Mr. George Standifer, towered over him and gloated. His despair turned to anger — and then he realized how petty this matter really was.

"Tak' yer ninety pair cent," he snorted angrily. "Tak' it a'. There's lots mair whaur that came frae."

"What do you mean by that?" snapped Standifer quickly.

Angus shook his head cannily. "Ne'er ye mind what I mean," he replied. "But ye canna ruin *me* wi' yer taxes. I can get a' the gowd I need."

Standifer reached into his pocket and took out the nugget again.

"Mr. MacAuliffe," he said solemnly. "I want you to look at this carefully. This nugget is not a scarf pin and never was one. It is an exact—and I might say *microscopically* exact, for I've examined it with a lens—copy of a fossil that's rather common in this neighborhood. Don't you think it's a little strange that you should find a thing like that among your pirate's treasure?"

Angus said nothing. Standifer picked up a golden salt shaker from the bed.

"This salt shaker," he said. "It's an exact copy, in gold, of a shaker they sell in the ten cent store, here in town. I wouldn't think that so strange, but it has 'Made in Occupied Japan' stamped on the bottom in gold letters. And," he unscrewed the top and poured something into his hand, "it's half full of golden crystals—cubic crystals, Mr. MacAuliffe, exactly imitating salt crystals!"

Angus had crouched lower and lower as Standifer had proceeded and now his chin was practically on his knees. Mr. Standifer suddenly cried "Catch!" and tossed Angus the salt shaker. Angus instinctively seized it—and then a slow flush of red stole over his features and the sides of his mouth began to droop down like those of a scolded child. Standifer picked up the *china* salt shaker and held it out accusingly.

"Aye," said Angus despairingly. "'Twas a' pack o' lies. I hae the gowden tooch o' Keeng Midas. That's how I toorned a' yon theengs to gowd."

"I guessed as much when I saw the fossil," said Standifer. "It was too perfect. I was sure it had been common sandstone, originally." He sat down beside Angus and looked at the salt shaker curiously. "But your touch seems to be working in reverse now. I guessed that, too, when you wouldn't touch the fossil. Suppose you tell me all about it."

Angus sighed again and nodded. "I'll be vurra glad to do so," he said meekly. "'Tis a boorden to ma vurra sowl."

WHILE all about them lay the glistening evidence that Angus

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was telling the truth, while outside the prospectors still scrabbled and quarreled over the dust that sparkled in Angus' yard, while Standifer shook his head again and again in amaze that his wild theory had actually turned out to be true, Angus related the entire events of the previous evening.

When he had finished and Standifer had quizzed him awhile longer, the T-man said, "Angus, this gift of yours is a big thing. I think you should come to Washington with me. This thing is entirely too big for a mere engineer from Glasgow."

"Happen 'tis entirely too beeg for a hobberdasher frae Independence, Missouri, too," said Angus dourly. "Do I have to gae?"

"No, not with me. But I'll have to report this to headquarters, and then there'll be dozens of big shots down here to investigate you—T-men and G-men, and Army men and Navy men and probably congressmen, too—"

"That's enow," barked Angus. "I'll no be havin' congressmen investeegatin' me. They'd hae me named a red Communist in nae time at a'. I'll gae wi' ye."

Standifer thanked him, and so it was that evening saw Angus, clad in his best tweeds and with a suitcase in his hand at the railroad station with George Standifer. The train arrived and Angus got on it, followed by the Secret Service man. The townsmen who hung around the station speculated futilely as to where he was going and why, but there is nothing strange in the fact that they were unable to guess anywhere near the truth.

Today, you would search in vain in that town for Angus MacAuliffe. He left — and he never returned. The rumors have grown, of course, and it is generally believed that the pockets of gold which were found in Angus' yard have something to do with his disappearance. Occasionally, some one hears of an Angus MacAuliffe in some other town, but it always turns out to be someone else.

And, indeed, there's small wonder in that, for Angus MacAuliffe is no longer known by that name at all. To the very important personages who know the top secret of his existence, he is known as Operation Midas.

And his address is Fort Knox, Kentucky.

THE END

Coming In the Next Issue

HEROES ARE MADE

by

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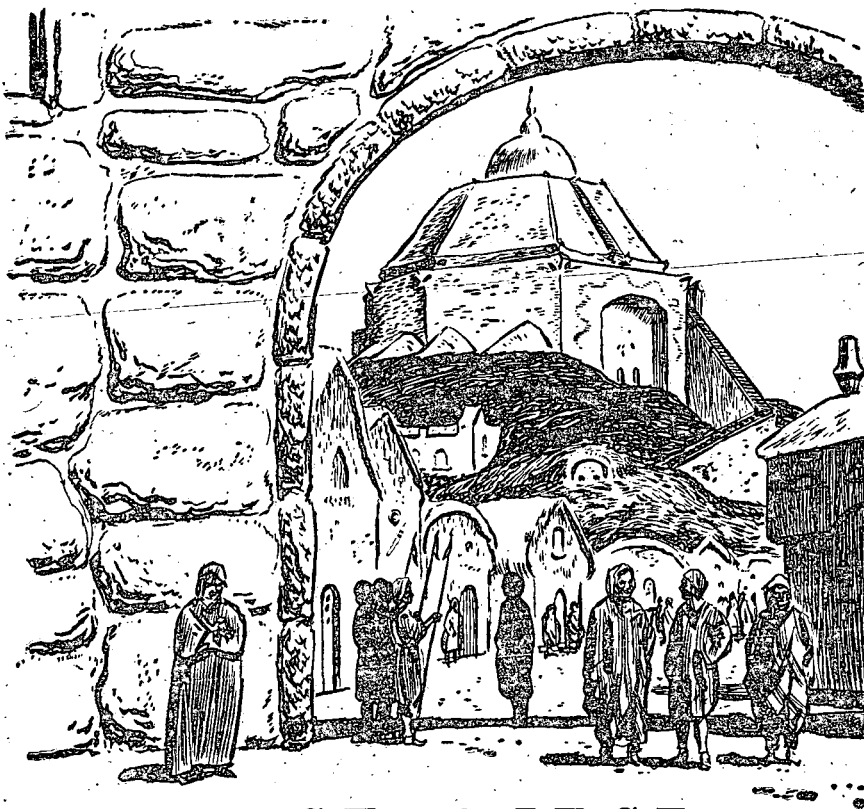

TEST PIECE

By Eric Frank Russell

The three Earthmen who landed on Shaksembender were put to a test, and if they failed — their lives were forfeit! You have here the same problem which faced them. The difference is that if you fail, we exact no penalty; if you win, however, you stand to gain a great deal. You will find the rules and a list of prizes at the end of the story. Now, it's up to you.

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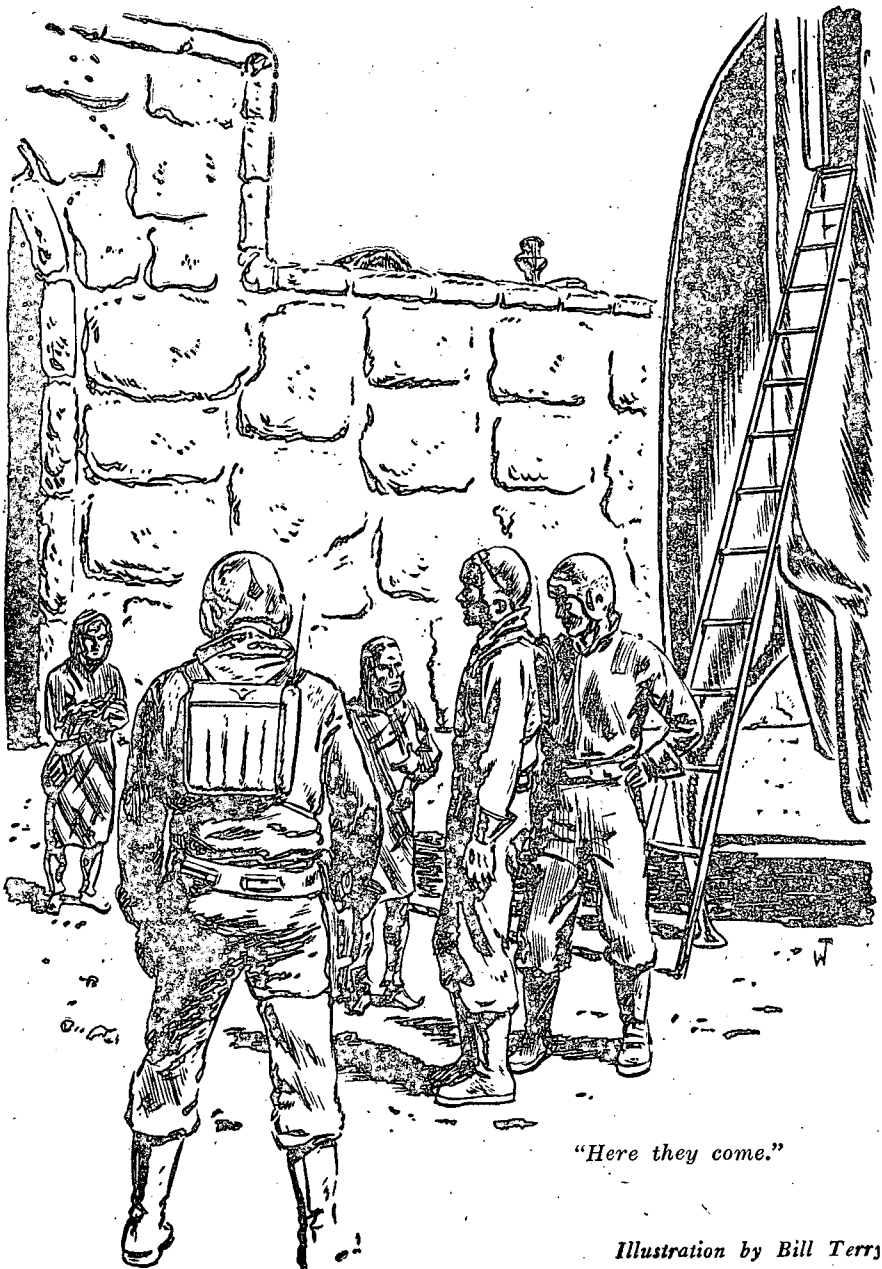

"Here they come."

Illustration by Bill Terry

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A shining blue-green globe, approximately Earth - size, Earth-mass, the new planet was exactly as described in the report. It lay fourth from a type G7 sun and unmistakably was the one they were seeking. The unknown and long-dead scout who had first found it certainly had picked a sphere that looked like home.

Pilot Harry Benton swung his superfast navy cruiser into a wide orbit while his two companions gave their destination a pre-landing survey. They found the largest city in the northern hemisphere, some seven degrees above the equatorial line and near to the shores of a great lake. Obviously it had not moved, or been replaced in greatness by some other city, as might well have happened in the three hundred years since the report was written. Time brings many wide and sometimes unexpected changes.

"Shaksembender," pronounced Navigator Steve Randle. "What a heck of a name to give a planet." He was looking at an official resume of the oldtime space-prober's message which—after all these years—had brought them on this hunt. "And to make it worse, their sun is dignified by the name of Gwilp."

"I've heard tell of a world in the Bootes sector called Plub," commented Engineer Joe Hibbert. "And furthermore, it's pronounced like you were blowing your nose. Give me Shaksembender — it's a speakable word."

"Then try your teeth on its capitol city," Randle invited. He spelled it slowly. "Tschflodrithashaksembender." He grinned at the other's expression. "Meaning, literally, the biggest burg on the little green world. For your comfort, the report says a native takes the strain off his epiglottis by referring to it in the shortened form of Taflo."

Benton chipped in with, "Hold tight. We're going down." He wrestled his controls, trying to watch six meters at once. The cruiser blew out of its orbit, spiralled earthward, hit atmosphere and went through it. Soon it roared on its last circle low over the city, leaving behind it a four-mile trail of fire and superheated air. The landing took the form of a prolonged and bumpy bellyslide across meadows to the east. Twisting round in his seat, Benton spoke with irritating self - satisfaction. "See, no corpses. Am I good!"

"Sheer luck," grunted Hibbert disdainfully. "I saw you let go everything and madly stroke a rabbit's foot. It has always worked, but some day it won't."

"We pilots being far above the primitive practices of the engineering profession—if one can call it a profession," began Benton with manifest superiority, "it is not our habit in moments of crisis to toy with any part of a coney's anatomy. Therefore I would have you understand —"

"Here they come," interrupted

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Randle, who was looking through a side-port. "A dozen or more, on the run."

Hibbert joined him, gazed through the armorglass. "How nice to be cheered in by friendly humanoids. It's a welcome change from what we seem to meet almost everywhere else: suspicious or hostile things resembling figments of the mind after a ten-course Venusian supper."

"They're right outside now," continued Randle. He counted. "Twenty of them." His hand went out as he switched the automatic lock. "We'll let them in."

He had no hesitation about doing that despite rough and tough experiences on many other worlds. After centuries of exploration this was only the third humanoid-inhabited planet to be discovered, and when one has had more than one's fill of life-forms surpassing anything conceived in dreams there is something heartening about a familiar human shape and form. It gives confidence. Any bunch of humanoids in the outlandish cosmos were like a colony of nationals established in foreign parts.

THEY poured into the ship, a dozen of them, with a smaller group content to wait outside. It was good to look upon them; one head, two eyes, one nose, two arms, two legs, ten fingers, all the old familiar fixings. No especial difference from the ship's crew except that they were a little smaller, a little lighter in build, and had skins of a deep, rich copper color. Yes, that was the greatest contrast: the dark glow of copper skins and gleam of jet black eyes.

Their leader spoke in archaic cosmoparla, forming his words like things learned painstakingly from tutors who had passed them down generation to generation.

"You are Earthlings?"

Benton said happily, "You're dead right. I'm Benton, the pilot. You can ignore these two cretins with me—they're just ballast."

The other received this assurance with uncertainty and a touch of embarrassment. He studied the two cretins doubtfully, returned his attention to Benton.

"I am Dorka the Scholar, one of those deputed to preserve your language against this day. We have been expecting you. Fraser assured us that eventually you would come. We thought you would be here long before now." His black eyes remained upon Benton, watching him, examining him, trying to peer into his mind. No joy of meeting shone within them; rather did they show a strange and wistful uneasiness, a mixture of hope and fear that somehow was communicated to his fellows and gradually grew stronger. "Yes, we expected you long ago."

"Maybe we should have been here long ago," admitted Benton, sobered by the unanticipated touch of ice in the reception. Casually,

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he pressed a wall-stud, listened for the almost unhearable response of apparatus hidden behind. "But we navy boys go where we're told when we're told, and we got no instructions about Shaksembender until recently. Who's this Fraser? — the scout who discovered you?"

"Of course."

"H'm! I guess his report got buried in bureaucratic files where a lot of other valuable reports may still be resting. Those oldtime daredevil space-snoopers like Fraser ran far beyond the official limits of their day, risking their necks and hides until they had a casualty list five yards long. An aged and bespectacled bureaucrat was about the only form of life that could frustrate them. That's the way to take the zip out of anyone troubled with excess of enthusiasm: file his report and forget it."

"Perhaps it is just as well," ventured Dorka, his peculiar air of uncertainty growing stronger. He glanced at the wall-stud but refrained from asking its purpose. "Fraser told us that the longer the time the better the hopes."

"He did, eh?" Mystified, Benton tried to analyze the other's deep copper features, but they revealed nothing. "What did he mean by that?"

Dorka fidgeted, licked his lips, behaved as if to say more was to say too much. Finally he evaded, "Which one of us can say what Earthlings mean? They are like us, yet not like us, for our thought-processes are not necessarily the same."

This was unsatisfactory. To gain a common understanding, a genuine basis on which an alliance might be founded, the matter was worth pursuing to the bitter end. But Benton did not bother. He had a special reason for that. It had to do with the apparatus still hissing faintly behind the wall. Centuries of space-roving inevitably compelled mankind to produce all the tools best fitted for the job.

So in a kindly and disarming manner, he said to Dorka, "I guess this Fraser was banking on closer accord based on ships lots bigger and faster than any known in his day. He slipped up slightly there. They're bigger all right, but hardly any faster."

"No?" Dorka's manner revealed that spaceship velocities had little or no bearing on whatever was bedevilling his mind. It was a polite, "No?" lacking surprise, lacking interest.

"They could be a whole lot swifter," Benton went on, "if we were content with the exceedingly low safety-margins of Fraser's time. But the era of death-or-glory has passed away. We build no suicide-bottles these days. We get from sun to sun in one piece and with clean underwear."

It was evident to all three that Dorka could not care less. He was preoccupied with something else,

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something elusive, unmentioned, some queer obsession to which there was no clue. In lesser degree it showed on the darkly colored faces of his companions crowding behind him. Amity chained by vague fear. Would-be friendliness concealed beneath a black shroud of doubt, of apprehension. They were like children who yearn to pat a strange animal but cannot be sure whether one end bites.

SO obvious was their common attitude, and so contrary to expectations, that Benton could not help but try mentally to find a reason for it. His mind moiled and toiled until it became suddenly struck with the notion that possibly Fraser—their only Terrestrial contact to date—had fallen foul of his hosts sometime after transmitting his report. Perhaps there had been differences, words, threats and eventually a clash between these copper-skins and the tough Earthling. Perhaps Fraser had tried to fight his way out, impressing them for three hundred years with the efficiency of Terrestrial weapons and their tremendous power to kill.

The same or a similar process of reasoning must have operated within Steve Randle's mind, because before Benton could speak again he shot a fast and pointed question at Dorka.

"How did Fraser die?"

The result was disappointing in its negativity. No guilt, no alarm came into the other's face. It merely showed retrospection as he answered.

"Samuel Fraser was no longer young when he found us. He said that we were his last venture, for the time had come to take root. So he stayed and lived among us until he grew old and weary and could no longer hold the breath of life. We burned his body as he had asked us to do."

"Ah!" said Randle, feeling defeated. His mind did not inquire why Fraser had not sought retirement on Earth, his home planet. It was notorious that the defunct Corps of Space Scouts had been composed entirely of very lone wolves.

"We had already melted down and made use of the metal of his ship, at his own suggestion," Dorka went on. "After his passing we placed the contents of his vessel in a shrine, along with his death-mask, and a bust of him made by our best sculptor, and a life-size portrait by our most talented painter. They are all here, those relics, still preserved and revered in Taflo." His eyes went inquiringly to each in turn as he added in quiet tones. *"Would you like to come and look at them?"*

It was idiotic and unreasonable and completely without justification, yet little alarm-bells rang faintly in Benton's mind. No question could have been more innocent or put more mildly; nevertheless

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it gave him a queer feeling that somewhere a trap-door had opened in readiness for him to drop through. The feeling was enhanced by the insufficiently concealed eagerness with which the copper-skins hung on his reply.

Would you like to come and look at them?

Will you walk into my parlor? said the spider to the fly.

That weird warning instinct, or intuition, or whatever it was, impelled Benton to yawn, stretch his arms wide and say, tiredly, "There is nothing we'd like more, but we're right at the end of a long, long trip and somewhat tuckered out. One good night's sleep will set us up like new men. How about first thing in the morning?"

Dorka became hurriedly apologetic. "I am so sorry. We should have known better than to impose ourselves upon you immediately you arrived. Please forgive us. We have waited so long for you and did not realize—"

"There is nothing to be regretted," assured Benton, trying in vain to reconcile his inward leeriness with the other's genuine and almost pathetic concern. "We could not have rested without first making contact. It would have been impossible. So your arrival saved us much trouble, for which we are truly grateful."

A little relieved, but still obviously bothered over what he chose to view as his own lack of consideration, Dorka backed out through the lock, taking his companions with him.

"We will leave you alone to your rest and sleep and I will see to it that you are not bothered by others. In the morning we will call again and show you around our city." Once more his gaze went penetratingly over all three. *"And we will show you Fraser's shrine."*

He departed. The lock closed. The mental alarm-bells were still ringing.

SITTING on the rim of the control-desk, Joe Hibbert massaged his ears and complained, "What I don't like about these whizz-bang receptions is that the thunderous cheers and the blare of massed bands leave me half deaf. Why can't people behave with more restraint, speak quietly, and invite us to a mausoleum or something?"

Frowning at him, Steve Randle said seriously, "There is something fishy about this business. They acted as if they were hopefully welcoming rich uncles rumored to have smallpox. They yearn to be remembered in the will but hanker after no spots." He glanced at Benton. "What do you think, Frowsy? Did you smell icicles?"

"I'll shave when some no-good thief returns my depilator, and my nose isn't good enough to smell the unsmellable, and I'm not bothering to do any more thinking until I've got data to think upon."

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Opening a recess just below the wall-stud, Benton took from it a platinum-mesh headpiece on the end of a length of thin cable. "Which data I am about to absorb."

He fixed the platinum on his own head, adjusted it carefully, set a couple of dials within the recess, lay back and appeared to go into a semi-trance. The others watched with interest. He sat there, saying nothing, eyes half-closed, while all sorts of expressions chased across his lean face. Finally he removed the cap, stowed it back in its hiding-place.

"Well?" prompted Randle, impatiently.

"His neural band coincides with ours, and the receiver picked up his thought-waves all right," said Benton. "It recorded them faithfully, but . . . I dunno."

"Most enlightening," commented Hibbert. "He doesn't know."

Ignoring him, Benton continued. "What all his thoughts boil down to is that they've not yet decided whether to kiss us or kill us."

"Huh?" Steve Randle stiffened aggressively. "Why the blazes should they contemplate the latter? We've done them no harm."

"Dorka's mind told a lot but it didn't tell enough. It said that reverence of Fraser has developed through the years until it has become almost a religion. Almost, but not quite. Being their only visitor from another world he's the most outstanding figure in their history, see?"

"That's understandable," agreed Randle. "But what of it?"

"Three hundred years have cast an aura of near-holiness around everything Fraser did and said. All the information he gave is preserved verbatim, the advice is treasured, the warnings remembered." Benton mused a moment. "And he warned them against Earth—*as it was in his day.*"

"Telling them to skin us alive first chance they get?" inquired Hibbert.

"No, definitely not. He warned them that Earth-psychology—as he knew it—would operate gravely to their disadvantage, even to their pain and sorrow, so that they might everlastingly regret the contact unless they had the wit and strength to break it by force."

"Growing old and on his last venture and ready to take root," remarked Randle. "I know the type. Doddering around, armed to the gums, thinking they're hot even while they're going cold. He was too long in the void and went queer with it. Ten to one he'd been space-happy for years."

"Maybe," conceded Benton doubtfully. "But I am not so sure. Pity we've no information about this Fraser. So far as I'm concerned, he's just a forgotten name dragged out of some bureaucrat's pigeonhole."

"As I will be in due time," offered Hibbert morbidly.

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"Anyway, he followed up that warning with a second one, namely, that it would be wise not to be impetuous in the matter of beating us off—because they might be beating their best friends. Human nature *does* change, he told them, and Earth-psychology changes with it. Any such change might be for the better, so much so that at some distant date Shaksembender would have nothing to fear. The longer it took us to make this contact, he asserted, the further into the future we'd be and the greater the likelihood of change." Benton looked vaguely worried. "Bear in mind that, as I told you, these views have become tantamount to heavenly commandments."

"This is one heck of a note," grumbled Hibbert. "By what this Dorka fondly imagines to be his secret thoughts—and probably they represent what all his fellows are thinking—we are going to be given the rah-rah or the rub-out according to whether in their opinion we've improved on some ephemeral standard laid down by a long-dead crackpot. Who the deuce was he to decide whether or not we're fit to associate with them? On what cockeyed basis are they going to determine the same thing today? How can they possibly *know* whether we've changed, and *how* we've changed, in the last three centuries? I don't see—."

Benton interrupted with, "You're planting your unwashed finger right on the sore spot. They think they can find out. In fact, they're sure of it."

"How?"

"If we speak two given words in a given set of circumstances we thereby betray ourselves. If we don't speak them, we're okay."

Hibbert laughed with relief. "Ships weren't fitted with thought-recorders in Fraser's time. They weren't even invented. He couldn't foresee those, could he?"

"No."

"So," continued Hibbert, amused by the futility of the situation, "you just tell us what circumstances were shown in Dorka's mind, and the fateful words, and we prove we're good guys by keeping our lips buttoned."

"All that is recorded of the circumstances is a shadowy mind-picture showing that they surround this shrine to which we've been invited," Benton told him. "Definitely, the shrine is the testing-place."

"And the two words?"

"Were not recorded."

Paling a little, Hibbert said, "Why not? Doesn't he know them?"

"That I can't say." Benton was openly moody about it. "The mind operates with thought-forms, with meanings, and not with pictorial words visible as such. The meanings become translated into words when speech is employed. Therefore he may not know the words at all or, alternatively, he cannot think of them in recordable man-

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ner because he doesn't know their meanings."

"Jeepers, they could be anything! There are millions of words."

"That would put the odds hugely in our favor," Benton pointed out grimly, "but for one thing."

"Such as what?"

"Fraser was a native Earthling who knew his own kind. Naturally he'd chose the two revealing words he considered *likeliest* to be used—then hope and pray he'd prove wrong."

Hibbert smacked his forehead in despair. "So early in the morning we amble to this museum like steers to a slaughterhouse. Then I open my big mouth and find myself holding a harp. All because these copper-faces place faith in a trap laid by an obscure space-nut." He stared irritably at Benton. "Do we blow free while the going is good, and report back to base? Or do we stay here and chance it?"

"Since when did the navy fail to see it through?" Benton inquired.

"I knew you would ask that." Sitting down, Hibbert resigned himself to what the morrow might hold. "Lend me your bit of rabbit, will you? I could use it right now."

THE morning proved clear and cold. All three were ready when Dorka reappeared accompanied by a score who may or may not have been the same individuals as before. It was hard to tell; their features looked so much alike.

Entering the ship, he said with restrained cordiality, "I trust you are rested? We do not again disturb you?"

"Not the way you mean," muttered Hibbert under his breath. He kept watch on the natives while his hands hung casually near the butts of two heavy belt-guns.

"We slept like the dead," assured Benton, unconsciously sinister. "Now we're ready for anything."

"That is good. I am happy for you." Dorka's dark gaze found their belts. "Weapons?" He blinked but did not change expression. "Surely those are not thought necessary here? Did not your Fraser live with us in peace? Besides, as you can see, we are unarmed. There is not so much as a fishing-stick between us."

"No mistrust is implied," Benton declared. "In the space-navy we are the poor slaves of multitudinous regulations. One such ruling orders that weapons will be worn during all first official contacts. Therefore we wear them." He put on a disarming smile. "If an order required us to wear grass skirts, high hats and false noses, you would now be confronted by such a spectacle."

If Dorka disbelieved this preposterous tale of slavery at such a distance from base, he did not show it. He accepted the fact that the Earthlings were armed and intended to stay that way no matter

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whether the impression created thereby were good or bad.

He was on safe ground in this respect—his own ground, his own territory. Small arms, dexterously used, could avail nothing against great numbers if he chose to give the thumbs-down sign surreptitiously, without warning. They could only make the gesture costly, at best. There are occasions when results come cheap regardless of cost.

"Leman, the Keeper of the Shrine, awaits you there," Dorka informed. "He, too, is an able speaker of your cosmoparla. He is very learned. Shall we visit him first and the city afterward? Or have you other ideas?"

Benton hesitated. Pity this Leman had not attended with the others yesterday. It was extremely likely that *he* knew the two significant words. The thought-recorder could have picked them out of his brain and served them up on a platter after he had gone, thus springing the trap and making it harmless. There would be no way of examining Leman's mind at the shrine, since no pocket-sized version of the thought-recorder existed, and neither race was telepathic.

The shrine. The center-point of the circumstances laid down by Fraser. The spot marked X.

There, natives would crowd around them, strong in numbers, fired by unknown fear of unknown things, tensed for action, watching their every move, keyed to every word they uttered, waiting, waiting, until one of them innocently mouthed the syllables that would be the signal.

In conditions like that the most they could hope for was the doubtful pleasure of taking a few with them. Two words—and a concerted jump as first and only evidence that unwittingly one of them had blundered. Blows, struggles, sweat, curses, choking sounds, perhaps a futile shot or two before oblivion.

Two words.

Death!

Afterward, a compounding with consciences as a quasi-religious service was held over their bodies. Coppery features suffused with sorrow but filled with faith as a chant sounded through the shrine.

"They were tried according to thy rulings and dealt with according to thy wisdom. They were weighed in the balance and found wanting. We thank thee, Fraser, for deliverance from those who were not our friends."

The same fate for the crew of the next vessel, and the next, and the next—until Earth either cut this world away from the mainstream of intergalactic civilization or subdued it with terrible retribution.

"Well, what do you wish?" persisted Dorka, eyeing him curiously.

Benton emerged from his mental ramblings with a start, conscious that all the others were looking at him. Hibbert and Randle were

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anxious. Dorka's face showed only polite concern, mild, in no way bloodthirsty or aggressive. That, of course, meant nothing. The Chinese of a thousand years ago could operate the communal strangling-post with total lack of visible emotion.

A voice which he recognized as his own came whispering out of nowhere, "Since when did the navy fail to see it through?"

Loudly and firmly, Benton said. "We'll go first to the shrine."

NEITHER in appearance nor bearing did Leman resemble the high priest of some strange other-star cult. Tall above the average for his race, gentle, solemn and very old, he looked like an aged and harmless librarian long escaped from ordinary life into a world of dusty books.

"These," he said to Benton, "are snapshots of the Earthly home that Fraser knew only in his boyhood. There is his mother, there is his father, and that peculiar hairy creature is what he called his dog."

Benton looked, nodded, said nothing. It was all very ordinary, very humdrum. Every guy had a home at some time or other. Every one had a father and mother, and many of them had owned dogs. He pretended a deep interest he did not feel while surreptitiously he tried to estimate the number of copper-faces in the room. Sixty to seventy of them—and another crowd outside. Too many.

With pedantic curiosity, Leman continued, "We have no creatures like that and there is no mention of them in Fraser's notes. What is a dog?"

A question! It had to be answered. His mouth must open and speak. Sixty or more pairs of eyes watching his lips. Sixty or more pairs of ears listening, waiting, waiting. Was this the fateful moment?

Involuntarily his muscles strained against a stab in the back as he replied, with poorly simulated carelessness, "A lesser animal, intelligent and domesticated."

Nothing happened.

Did the tenseness go down a little, or had it never been up except in his own apprehensive imagination? There was no way of telling.

Producing an object for their inspection, handling it like a precious relic, Leman said, "This article is what Fraser called his pal. It gave him great comfort, though we do not understand in what manner."

The thing was an old, battered and well-used pipe, its bowl burned partway down one side. There was nothing about it other than evidence of how pathetic are personal treasures when their owner has gone. Benton felt that he ought to say something but didn't know what. Hibbert and Randle determinedly played dumb.

To their relief, Leman put the pipe away, asked no prying ques-

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tions about it. His next exhibit was the dead scout's beam-transmitter, its outer casing polished with loving care, its insides corroded beyond repair. It was this piece of antiquated apparatus which had boosted Fraser's report to the nearest inhabited sector whence planet after planet had relayed it back to Earth-base.

Next came a jack-knife, a rhodium-plated chronometer, wallet, automatic lighter, a whole host of old and petty things. Fourteen times Benton went cold as he was forced to answer questions or respond to remarks. Fourteen times the general strain—real or imagined—appeared to shoot up to peak then gradually relax.

"What is this?" inquired Leman, handing over a folded document.

Benton opened it carefully. An officially issued form of last will and testament. There were a few words upon it, hurriedly written, but neat, decisive.

"I, Samuel Fraser, Number 727 of the Terran Corps of Space Scouts, have nothing to leave but my good name."

Refolding it, he handed it back, explaining it and translating its script into cosmoparla.

"He was right," remarked Leman. "But what man can leave more?" Turning to Dorka, he spoke briefly in the liquid syllables of the local language which the three earthlings did not understand. Then to Benton, "We will show you Fraser's likeness. You will then know him as we saw him."

Hibbert gave a nudge. "Why did he switch to that alien gabble?" he asked, doing substantially the same by speaking in English. "I'll tell you—because he didn't want us to know what he was saying. Get ready, brother, we're coming to it. I can feel it in my bones."

BENTON shrugged, turned, the natives pressing close around him, too closely for the fast action that at any moment might be required. There was a peculiar fervor on the faces of the audience as they looked toward the end wall, an intensity as of people about to be favored once in a lifetime. The surge of emotion could be felt, a mass-emotion that could lead to anything, be directed anywhere, to everlasting brotherhood or to raging death.

A tremendous sigh came from this crowd as the aged Leman pulled aside high drapes and revealed the Man from Outside. There was a lifesize bust on a glittering pedestal, also an oil painting between six and seven feet high. Both had those confident but indefinable touches that mark superb talent. So far as could be judged, both were excellent studies of their subject.

Silence for a long time. Everyone seemed to be waiting for some remark from the Earthlings. There was a deep, expectant hush like that in court when the foreman of the

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jury is about to pronounce the verdict. But here, in this crazily contrived and menacing situation, the defendants were saddled with the onus of mouthing their own verdict upon themselves. It was for those secretly on trial to pronounce themselves guilty or not guilty of an unknown crime committed in an unknown way.

The three had no illusions; they knew that this was indeed the crisis. They could sense it intuitively, could read it in surrounding coppery features. Benton posed grave-faced with firmly closed lips. Randle was fidgety, like one unable to decide which way to jump when the time came. Belligerently fatalistic, Hibbert stood with legs braced wide apart, hands poised in readiness above his belt, in the manner of a man determined not to go down without exacting payment for it.

"Well," invited Leman, his voice suddenly hard, "What do you think of him?"

No response. They stood together, in a tight little group, wary, prepared, and stared at the picture of a scout three hundred years dead. None spoke.

Leman frowned. His tones sharpened. "Surely you have not lost the faculty of speech?"

He was forcing the issue, pushing it along to a conclusion. It was too much for the irritable Hibbert. Grasping his guns, Hibbert spoke fiercely, resentfully.

"I don't know what you expect us to say and it's got so I don't care a darn, either. But I'll tell you this, whether you enjoy it or not: Fraser is no god. Anyone can see that. He's just a plain, ordinary space-scout from pioneering days, and that's about as near as any man can get to being a god."

If he anticipated a violent reaction he was disappointed. Everyone hung on his words, but none viewed the speech as tantamount to insulting an idol in its own temple.

On the contrary, one or two listeners nodded in mild approval.

"Space breeds a certain type just as the great oceans breed a type," Benton put in by way of explanation. "That holds true for Terrestrials, Martians or any other cosmos-roaming form of life. You get so that you can recognize them at a glance." He licked dry lips, finished, "Therefore Fraser, being true to type, looks pretty ordinary to us. There's not much one can say about him."

"Guy's like him are ten a penny in the space-navy today," added Hibbert. "Always have been, always will be. They're no more than men with an incurable itch. Sometimes they do wonderful things, sometimes they don't. They've all got guts but not all have the luck. This Fraser struck lucky, mighty lucky. He could have sniffed around fifty sterile planets—but he hit on one loaded with humanoids. That's the sort of bonanza every spaceman prays for even today. It is what

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makes history."

Hibbert ended, a little bemused because all his spouting had produced no adverse effect. It made him feel sort of triumphant. There is satisfaction in getting away with talk in circumstances where one's tongue might precipitate a sudden and violent end. Two words. Two commonplace and likely-to-be-used words, and somehow he had successfully dodged both of them without knowing what they were.

"You have nothing more to say?" asked Leman, watching them.

Benton offered amiably, "I guess not, except that it's nice to have seen what Fraser looked like. Pity he's not still alive. He would have been happy to find Earth at last responding to his call."

A slow smile came into Leman's dark features. He made a swift, peculiar gesture to his audience, pulled the drapes together and hid the picture.

"Now that you have finished here, Dorka will conduct you to the city center. Persons high in our government are anxious to talk with you. Let me say how glad I am to have met you. I hope it will not be long before more of your people—"

"There is one thing before we go," Benton interjected hurriedly. "We'd like an interview with you in private."

Faintly surprised, Leman signed toward a nearby door. "Very well. Please come this way."

Benton pulled Dorka's sleeve. "You, too. This concerns you and you might as well be in on it."

IN the seclusion of his room Leman gave them chairs, seated himself. "Now, my friends, what is it?"

"Among the latest instruments in our ship," explained Benton, "is a kind of robot guardian which reads the minds of any life-forms utilizing thought-processes similar to ours. Maybe it is a bit unethical, but it's a necessary and valuable protection. Forewarned is forearmed, see?" He gave a sly smile. "It read Dorka's mind."

"What?" exclaimed Dorka, standing up. He gazed around in bewilderment, became sheepish, sat down again.

"It told us that we were in some vague but definite peril," Benton went on. "It said that inherently you were our friends, wanted to be and hoped to be friends—but two words would reveal us as enemies, fit to be treated as such. If we spoke those words we were through! We know now, of course, that we have not uttered those words, else the situation would not be as it is right now. We have passed muster. All the same, I want to know something." He leaned forward, his gaze penetrating. *"What were those two words?"*

Thoughtfully rubbing his chin, and in no way fazed by what he had been told, Leman said, "Fraser's advice was based on knowledge

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we did not and could not share. We accepted it without question, knowing neither his reasons nor his motives, but recognizing that he drew from a well of other-worldly wisdom unavailable to us. He advised us to show you his shrine, his possessions, his picture. And if you spoke two words—"

"What were they?" Benton persisted.

Closing his eyes, Leman pronounced them clearly, painstakingly, like part of a long-preserved creed.

Benton rocked back. He stared dumbfoundedly at Randle and Hibbert, caught them staring similarly at him. All three were puzzled, defeated.

At last, Benton inquired, "What language is that?"

"Terrestrial of some sort," assured Leman. "Fraser's own natural speech."

"What do those two words mean?"

"That, I cannot tell you," said Leman, becoming equally puzzled. "I have not the remotest notion of their significance. Fraser never told their meaning and none asked him for an explanation. We have memorized and practiced the sound of them, as the words of warning which he gave us, and that is all."

"It beats me," confessed Benton, scratching his head. "In all my sinful life I've never heard them."

"If those words are of Earthly origin it may be they're too ancient for anyone but some long-haired professor of dead languages," suggested Randle. He mused a moment, added, "I once heard that in Fraser's time they referred to the cosmos as the 'void' despite that it is filled with many forms of matter and anything but void."

"They might not be even an ancient Earth-language," Hibbert offered. "Those words could come out of oldtime space-lingo or archaic cosmoparla."

"Say them again," Benton invited.

Obligingly, Leman said them again. Two simple words of two syllables each, and none had heard the like.

Benton shook his head. "Three hundred years is a heck of a long time. Doubtless those were common words in Fraser's day. But now they're discarded, buried, forgotten—forgotten so long and completely that I couldn't hazard a guess at what they meant."

"Me, neither," agreed Hibbert. "Good job none of us got over-educated. It's a hell of a note when a spaceman can have his stone put up early just because he remembers a couple of out-of-date noises."

Benton came to his feet. "Oh, well, no use pursuing what has disappeared for ever. Let's go see how the local bureaucrats compare with our own." He eyed Dorka. "Ready to take us along?"

Hesitating a moment, Dorka registered embarrassment as he asked,

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"Have you still got this thought-reading contraption with you?"

"It is firmly fixed in the ship." Benton laughed as he patted the other reassuringly. "Much too big to carry around. You think your own thoughts and be happy, because we won't know what they're about."

They went out, making for the center of Taflo where the great silvery spire of the government building speared into a purplish sky.

"..... .....!" said Benton, repeating the forbidden words. "I don't get it. One might as well say *pfornid akshum*, since it's just as meaningless."

"It is so much clutter," indorsed Hibbert.

"Clutter," echoed Randle. "Now I come to think of it, they had a deuce of a funny word for that in olden days. I found it in a book once." He thought awhile, ended, "Yes, I remember it. They called it gabbledegook."

THE END

TEST PIECE

Contest Rules and Prizes

AUTHOR Eric Frank Russell had three little words in mind when he wrote this story, and he kept them there! He didn't put them in the story; that little job he left to you! In other words, it's a contest. If you can name those three little words, you just might win a piffling little prize of some sort. (See list.)

Usually there are rules to a contest; but this magazine hates rules—we do things for fun. Contests are fun, rules are not. For instance, everybody knows we won't be stinkers enough to award the prize to a member of the office staff, or to a relative. Just take it for granted we won't cheat. Next, you can write on any darn side of the paper you choose, or on both sides. We aren't so stupid we can't find the other side of a sheet of paper. And third, what if you haven't got a pen, or it's out of ink, or you intend to submit your entry on a blotter? You use a pencil. Or a crayon. Or spell it out with nail-heads on a board. Naturally, if we can't read it, you don't win—and that's not our fault. And it isn't a rule that you ought to submit your entry before the contest ends—that's just common sense. The contest ends April 15 (so's we can announce the winners in the July issue, on sale June 5.) No hokum about postmarks on your entry—you figure to get it to us by the 15th, and allow enough time for Uncle Sam to make delivery. Our readers are rated smarter than a postmark. As to the opinions of the judges being final, that never did make any sense to us. What if you did think your entry was better? What could you do about it? Most judges are selected anyway because they have no connection with the magazine, and therefore don't know what's going on. We'll judge the entries right here on the staff, and you take 'em or leave 'em.

Now for the prizes: For a while

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that had us buffaloed, because we hate to give things away; but we finally decided on a few things that we won't miss. Here they are:

FIRST PRIZE: $100 (in money you can *spend*).

SECOND PRIZE: An Original Cover Painting from OTHER WORLDS, handsomely framed so you can hang it on your study wall. We paid $125.00 for it, so you know what it's worth. You can price frames yourself to see they aren't reasonable. By the way, the cover is a McCauley, and it hasn't been used yet! Kind of a blind date, hey, but you know how good McCauley is!

THIRD PRIZE: A Lifetime Subscription to OTHER WORLDS and FATE (our other magazine all you nice readers should read—advertisement). We would appreciate a cancellation notice from the winner in case of death—or the address of the cemetery.

FOURTH PRIZE: A Five-Year Plan—you get OTHER WORLDS to read free for five years. (In this plan, you *buy* FATE.)

FIFTH PRIZE: A 24-Issue Subscription to OTHER WORLDS. (We'll send you an invoice when renewal time comes around!)

SIXTH to TWENTY-FIFTH PRIZES: A 12-Issue Subscription to OTHER WORLDS.

TWENTY-SIXTH TO FIFTIETH PRIZES: An original illustration from OTHER WORLDS (our selection). We pay an average of $25.00 for these (no premium for nudes).

And there you are. The total value of all these prizes is $1,166.00 (assuming the third prize winner lives 50 years and Uncle Sam's C-note is worth $100.00 and not $59.00-; but we aren't going to call it a GIGANTIC $1,166.00 PRIZE CONTEST just to make it sound big. As you've noticed, we haven't even mentioned it on the cover. This is just for our readers, not for a lot of outsiders to horn in just to grab the prizes away and never read the magazine again.

So go ahead and read the contest story and try to guess those two words. When you've guessed, write us a letter telling us (any number of words over 50 or under 50 you choose) why you think those are the two little words. The reason for this is so we have a basis to decide for one correct guesser over another, provided they both guess aright. All contests got to have an out for the judges, you know!

Oh yes, we forgot, there is one more prize! The FIFTY-FIRST prize is a One-Week Vacation on Ray Palmer's farm at Amherst, Wisconsin. There you will have the privilege of fishing for trout in the two trout streams, or in the lake for bass and great northerns or walleyes, if you prefer), hiking over the 126 acres of lovely wooded countryside, swimming in the crystal-clear water, eating every kind of berry and fruit until it comes out of your ears, and if you wish, running the sawmill or the grist mill yourself, (ever saw a log on a really big saw?) Added attractions, Richard Shaver lives three quarters of a mile away, and he'll be glad to tell you all about it. No catch to this—all expenses paid! Fishing equipment provided. And plenty of good, healthy home-cooked food!

In all other contests, the winner of last prize generally gets something worthless. In this contest, you get the best prize of all! Go to it, guys and gals. This is one contest you can back into! The Editors

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THE SWITCHEROO

By Fredric Brown & Mack Reynolds

The switcheroo did a wonderful thing—it sent you into the body you were thinking of at the time. Yeah, we know who you're thinking of!

McGEE barely glanced at the story I'd just put before him on his desk before he roared and tore it across twice and threw it into his wastebasket. "Who told *you* you were a reporter, Price?" he howled. "The *Globe* doesn't print tripe like that and you know it."

McGee is the toughest city editor I've ever encountered and the worst of it is that his bite is worse than his bark. I was teetering on the ragged edge of my job, and it was a job I needed. I'd been fired from both of the other papers in Springfield and if McGee fired me, too, I'd have to go out of town for a job. And there were reasons why I couldn't do that.

So, much as I hated McGee's guts, I bottled my wrath and said mildly, "I thought it had human interest. Okay, sorry if it missed the boat. Got any other assignment?"

He looked at his calendar pad and growled, "Go see Tarkington Perkins. Maybe he's ripe."

I said, "I'm afraid I don't remember—"

"You wouldn't even remember your own name, you nitwit. He's the nut inventor we ran a squib on four months ago. He was working on a cheap substitute for water. I made a note for a follow-up to see how he did on it, or what he's doing now. Get a story."

"Sure," I said, and backed out. You don't argue with McGee.

I got Tarkington Perkins' address out of the morgue and took the streetcar there, thinking happily all through the long ride of a thousand unpleasant things that might happen to McGee. Of late that had been almost my only happy line of thought. Unfortunately, none of the things I thought of ever happened.

I rang the bell of the house whose address I'd obtained from the morgue files. The door opened and I stepped back. The female who opened the door was the most repellent specimen I'd ever seen. She

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Illustration by Bill Terry

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weighed at least two-fifty and looked like a battleship of an unfriendly foreign power spoiling for a fight. She looked tougher than McGee, and she glowered at me in the same way he does.

I tried not to retreat any farther. I asked, "Is this the home of Tarkington Perkins?"

"What do *you* want with him?"

I said hastily, "I'm from the *Globe*. I'd like *to* discuss his latest invention with him. Uh—if I may."

She looked at me as though I'd said I'd come to infest the house with bedbugs, but she stepped aside and let me in. "That worm is down in the basement," she said, as nastily as though it was my fault.

She stuck her hideous head through a doorway and screamed, "Tark! There's some fool wants to see you."

She turned back and snarled at me, "Other men are plumbers or bank robbers or something. *I* had to marry an *inventor*." And from the way she glared at me, I got the idea that that was almost as bad as being a newspaperman.

I edged around her, shuddering as soon as I was out of her sight, and made my way down the cellar steps.

The little man bending over the bench looked like a man who'd been married for a long time to the woman I'd just escaped from. He didn't look up as I came toward him. "Got a dime?" he asked me plaintively.

"Huh?" I said.

"Or a quarter. I need a piece of silver."

I felt in my pocket and found a dime. He took it without even looking at me, but I looked at him. Tarkington Perkins, if he'd had an overcoat on and a suitcase in his hand, might have weighed half as much as his wife. He had a face that looked as though it had been used, figuratively if not literally, as a doormat. He turned his head and blinked tired, owlish eyes at me.

"Hello," he said. "Uh—I hope you'll forgive—" He didn't dare go any farther, and I knew he was referring to the Sherman Tank upstairs. Somehow, my heart went out to him. I wanted to tell him that I had a city editor almost—not quite—as bad, but it didn't seem the right thing to say.

So I just smiled at him and said, "Not at all," whatever I meant by that. "I'm Jake Price from the *Globe*. My editor says you're working on something that might have a story in it. A—a substitute for water, I believe."

"Oh, that. I quit working on that two months ago. I got a substitute all right, but I'm afraid it wasn't cheaper. I've spent most of my time since then working on cilohocla beverages."

"I'm sorry," I said. "Would you mind repeating—?"

"Cilohocla," he repeated. "That's *alcoholic* spelled backward. The effect is the other way around."

"You mean—" I said, not even

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guessing what he *could* mean.

"Works the other way. I mean, you get the hangover first and the next morning you feel wonderful. As high as a—a—"

"A kite?"

"Thank you. Would you care for a drink?"

My mind must have missed a boat somewhere. I *did* want a drink and I failed to tie in that idea with what we'd just been talking about, if anything. So I said yes and he brought out a bottle of something and a glass and told me to help myself. I remembered, then, and sniffed it before tasting, but it was whisky, merely whisky. I took a good drink.

HE said, "But that was until a few days ago. Now I'm working on something new and I'd almost finished it when you came. In fact, that bit of silver *did* finish it. It's a switcheroo."

I said, "That's nice. Uh—aren't you drinking?"

He frowned. "I'd like to, but—" Involuntarily his eyes looked at the ceiling. Words could not have been more explanatory than the look in his eyes. "But you go ahead, drink all you want. And thanks for the dime. I'll pay you back someday."

"Never mind, Mr. Perkins," I said generously. After all, that first slug of whisky I'd poured myself had been at least fifty cents worth, and I now poured myself another. "You said you had just finished a—"

"A switcheroo. That's just my pet name for it, of course. Actually it is a psychoreversamentatron."

"Oh," I said. "This is really fine whisky, Mr. Perkins. You really don't mind if I—"

"Not at all. Drink all of it you wish. Please."

"What does it do?"

"I told you. You get the hangover first and then, tomorrow morning, you feel happily intoxicated."

"I mean the psychore — the switcheroo."

"It switches minds, of course."

I looked at him, and then I poured myself another drink of his wonderful whisky and decided I might as well string along while the bottle lasted. Funny, though, I didn't feel the effect of it at all, although that drink was my fourth, and they'd all been stiff ones. At that price I always pour myself stiff ones.

His face was working with excitement and with eagerness for me to ask him to go on. I asked him to go on, and poured myself a fifth drink. A stiff one.

"It switches minds from one brain to another. You press this little switch while you concentrate on any given person, and your mind is translated into his body. And vice versa."

"Vice versa?" I asked.

"Vice versa," he said.

I looked down, for the first time, at the object lying on the bench

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before us. It wasn't big. It seemed to be made up of a flashlight, an alarm clock and some parts from an Erector set. My dime was soldered as the final connection between the flashlight and the alarm clock, just abaft the switch to which he was pointing.

I said, "You mean you can trade brains with someone just by training that gadget on him?"

He shook his head violently in protest. "Not brains, minds. Your mind takes over his brain. And vice versa. And you don't have to train it on him, just point the flashlight into your own face and pull the switch. But you have to be concentrating on whoever you want to change with. Like if I wanted to be governor, I'd just think about the governor, and I'd be in his body in his mansion and he'd be *me*. I mean, he'd have to come here and live with Martha." His eyes were wistful at the thought.

He added plaintively, "If it works. Distance shouldn't matter, but I think the first time I'll try to be near him. Just in case."

"Near who?" I asked. "I mean, near whom?"

"The governor."

I thought of Betty Grable. "You be governor," I said. "I'll be Harry James."

I poured myself another drink. Strangely, the stuff wasn't making me drunk at all. I was beginning to get a bit jittery and the air in the basement must not have been good for I was acquiring a slight headache.

It wasn't helped when a loud bellow rolled suddenly down the basement steps. "You, Tark! Time to do the washing. Get that no-good reporter out of there and get to work."

He smiled at me apologetically and said, "I'm sorry, but—well, you see how it is."

"Sure," I said. I helped myself to one more generous drink of his whisky—almost emptying the bottle this time—to see if another shot would help my headache and the generally jittery way I felt. Then I ran the gantlet of the bug-eyed monster upstairs and beat my way back to the street.

I went back to the paper and into McGee's office.

He glowered at me, but it wasn't as bad this time. Tarkington Perkins' wife had been worse. He said, "My God, you look like the morning after. You were sober when you left here. Weren't you?"

I put my hands in my pockets so McGee wouldn't see how badly they were shaking, and I tried to blink the bleariness out of my eyes and keep him from guessing about the little men who were working at the rivets in the back of my neck.

I said, "I was sober. I am sober. But tomorrow morning—"

"Forget tomorrow morning. What's this nut inventor working on?"

I thought about the switcheroo

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and decided it wouldn't be safe to mention it. I told him about the cilohocla beverage that had tasted exactly like whisky. Suddenly I found that I *believed* in it and that I was still cold sober.

His roar almost blew me out of the office.

"Price," he said, when he'd calmed down enough to be understandable, "this is your last chance. That is, tomorrow's your last chance. It's almost five now. Go home and sleep it off and come in sober tomorrow or never come in again."

I came in the next morning as high as a kite. I felt wonderful, better than I'd ever felt before as far as I could remember. I was happily fuzzy and fuzzily happy, but it wasn't exactly the same kind of inebriation I was accustomed to. If I made an effort I could disguise it and act sober. When I got called into McGee's office for my assignment I disguised it and acted sober.

He glowered at me. "This Tarkington Perkins," he said. "Why didn't you recognize he was insane?"

I thought that over, and before I got anywhere with it, McGee roared at me. "Missed the story again, you halfwit. He's in the nuthouse right now—got taken there last night, only a few hours after you *interviewed* him."

He put a nasty inflection on the word *interviewed*.

I said something, I don't know what. In spite of my general state of happiness I felt sorry that that had happened to Perkins. I'd felt sorry for the little guy and I'd liked him.

He said, "It happened last night and the morning paper beat us to it anyway, but go around and get some more on it. We got to run a story on it anyway."

"What happened?" I asked.

"They picked him up yesterday evening on the lawn of the governor's mansion, yelling that he was the governor and that somebody had stolen his body."

I closed my eyes.

WHEN I opened them I was safely outside McGee's office. First I sat down at my desk and called the morning paper. I found out who'd covered the Perkins pick-up and it was a friend of mine so I got him on the phone and got the story; it was just about as McGee had told it. I asked, "What's happened to the governor?"

"Huh?" he said, "What's that got to do with it? He left for Washington early this morning to keep an appointment he had with the president."

"Oh," I said.

I didn't go to the nuthouse to interview Perkins or the people who had taken him there or were working with him.

I went to the governor's mansion and flashed my press card on the guard and got him to show me just where Tarkington Perkins had been

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found and apprehended. I started making circles around the bushes and I found what I was looking for. It was a gadget made up of a flashlight and an alarm clock and some parts from an Erector set.

I looked at it and wondered whether I was crazy or whether Tarkington Perkins was crazy or whether that *gadget* was crazy.

I looked into the lens of the flashlight and it looked like any other flashlight.

I was a bit drunk, remember. Otherwise, while I was thinking about Tarkington Perkins, in the governor's body, going to interview the president, and wondering whether the president was going to guess something was wrong — in other words, while I was thinking about the president—I would not have inadvertently moved the gadget's switch.

The light blinded me; it was brighter than any flashlight should have flashed, unless it had an atomic battery. It blinded me and I was listening to music. Music that was poignant, ethereal. It moved me deeply, although generally it's not that kind of music that I go for. I prefer Harry James. And maybe, at that moment, I should have been thinking about Harry James instead of the president. But I hadn't been.

And the music moved me all right. It moved me several hundred miles in nothing flat.

I opened my eyes and there I was sitting in an oval room. A familiar room. I'd seen it once before when I'd been in Washington. It had been empty then; the president had been out of town and they'd just let me look around the White House as a visiting newspaperman.

But the president wasn't out of town now. Not much, I wasn't.

THE president's secretary was bowing to me. He said, "Mr. President, the governor with whom you have the appointment is here to speak to you. But—ah—I'm wondering if you should see him. He seems to be acting a bit strangely."

"Aren't we all?" I asked him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. President?"

"Not at all," I said. "Just send Governor Andressen in, please. And cancel *all* my other appointments for today."

"But, Mr. President, the envoy from Baluchistan—"

I told him what to tell the envoy from Baluchistan and he left, looking somewhat shocked. But he was back, a moment later, with Governor Andressen.

I waved the governor to a seat across from my desk and waited until the secretary had left. Then I pointed a finger at him.

"Tarkington Perkins," I said, "you can't get away with it."

I never saw a man wilt more suddenly. I felt sorry for him, all over again.

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I said, "Never mind, Tark. I won't get you in trouble. I'll straighten everything out."

"But Mr. President, how could you have possibly have known—?"

"The F. B. I.," I said, "sees all, knows all, and reports to me. I feel sorry for you, Tark, but it won't wash. Something like this can get too many people into too much trouble: It could start wars, and it could even lose elections. You understand that, don't you?"

He almost whimpered his affirmative.

I picked up the telephone. To whoever it was who answered it, I said, "Charter a plane for me at once for a trip to Springfield. Two passengers."

"Yes, Mr. President. But—ah—your private plane. Won't it serve satisfactorily?"

"Don't bother me with details," I said. "*Any* plane will do. Just so a helicopter picks us up on the White House lawn to take us to the airport. Do you know the address of the White House?"

"Why—of course, Mr. President."

"Then get that helicopter helicoptering," I ordered brusquely.

I slammed down the phone and picked it up again. I said, "Get me Chief of Police Crandall at Springfield. Fast. Make it a person to person call."

I held onto the phone and had Chief Crandall in three minutes. He's a guy I hate, because he hates reporters.

I said, "Mr. Crandall, this is the President of the United States, calling from the White House." I put it all in capitals, just like that.

He sounded suitably awed.

I said, "Mr. Crandall, there have been complaints that you have been unjust to the public press, that you have failed to cooperate with the local papers — even on matters where cooperation would not have been against policy. Public policy, I mean."

He sounded as though he was going to cry.

I said, "Mr. Crandall, it happens I have a very important and very secret matter I wish to take care of in Springfield. I—and Governor Andressen will be with me—am flying there immediately; we'll be there in a few hours. And if you can take care—satisfactorily and secretly—of certain matters before our arrival, I'll overlook the matters I have mentioned and back you in the coming campaign."

"Certainly, Mr. President. *Anything.*"

"First," I said. "Make a search of the lawn of the governor's mansion. In or near the edge of a flowerbed on the north side of the grounds you will find a gadget which looks like a combination of a flashlight and an alarm clock — with trimmings, including a switch. Find that and hold it for me until I arrive. Under no circumstances try to operate it or throw the switch. Understand?"

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"Certainly, Mr. President."

"Second, I want you to have two men waiting to see Governor Andressen and myself. One is named Tarkington Perkins. He is now in the insane asylum. He was picked up and sent there last night. The other is named Jake Price, a reporter for the Globe. He, too, may be found suffering from paranoia. It is quite probable that he has already been apprehended, for claiming that he is someone he isn't. I laughed. "Possibly the President of the United States."

"We have him here now, Mr. President. We were about to send him to—"

"Don't," I said. "Treat him kindly. Have him and Mr. Perkins placed in a suite at the Carleton Hotel and held until our arrival. Treat them with every courtesy — just so they don't escape. And have the swi—the gadget I mentioned brought there, too."

JUST four hours later, the President of the United States, the governor of our state, Tarkington Perkins and myself were alone in the presidential suite of the Carleton Hotel. And in my hand was the gadget, the switcheroo.

I explained, and I made a suggestion. It was accepted, and complete amnesty with it. The four of us left. The president to return to Washington, and the governor with him to carry out their original subject of discussion, whatever that had been. Tarkington Perkins to his home—and to whatever explanation he could make to the Sherman Tank.

Jake Price—that's me, and recognizable again—to the office of the *Globe*. I took the gadget with me, I put it on McGee's desk.

McGee looked at it and at me. His face was turning slightly pink around the jaws. He said, "What's this?" He looked at it and then at me. He roared, "Where've you been for *seven hours* on a simple assignment like that?"

I said, "Listen, McGee—"

"I *won't* listen. You're fired. Get out of here! From my sight."

I was sober by then; I was over the only drunk of my life that would not have a hangover to follow. I was sober and I had an idea, a wonderful idea.

A soft answer turneth away rats, and McGee was the rattiest rat I'd ever known. So I answered him softly. I said, "All right, Mr. McGee. I'll leave. Would you mind if I used your phone for one short call first? I want to be sure of something."

"Okay," he growled at me.

I looked up Tarkington Perkins' number and called it. The Medusa answered. I asked for Tark and she said, "You can't talk to him. *I'm* talking to him. *I'm telling kim—*"

That was what I wanted to know and I put the receiver back on the phone. I picked up the gadget and

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pointed the flashlight at McGee's face. I said, "McGee, who did you send me to find out about?"

"Huh? You crazy? *Tarkington Per—*"

I pushed the switch. Once. Then I smashed the gadget, for keeps.

I explained to Tarkington Perkins, in McGee's body. And then he and I went out together to hang on the drunk of our lives.

I'd have loved to have gone out and seen what happened between McGee and Mrs. Tarkington Perkins, but maybe someday I'll see an atomic war, whether I want to or not, and I can wait till then.

THE END

LETTERS (*Continued from page* 61)

stories but it helps. The best thing about OW is the covers. They are, without doubt, the finest on the market now. All the other mags have "girlie" covers which make same mag look unutterably cheap. All the other branches of the pulp field have girls on their cover, with the result that I cannot tell them apart except for the title. In my estimation, and in most other fans' too, a girlie cover gives the mag two strikes right there. You have had only one bad cover, and to see you change that policy after *one* issue makes me glad. Of course aSF has non-female covers too, but theirs stink anyway. The whole mag stinks. If you are trying to pattern yourselves after them, I am glad that you are doing a bad job of it. Keep it that way. Stick to the present cover policy, and make a lot of fans happy.

Another good thing is your editorial policy. By this I mean the way you are not afraid to admit that other SF mags exist and are willing to mention their names. I hope the others change in time, too. Another thing that I like the way it is.

The Editorial is the most sensible of any magazine. (But I read the reprint mags and like them.) The Personal column is a very good idea. The Letter section is just the right length, and you select the most interesting letters, it seems. Another thing. If you can keep the ads down to the current minimum, I will pay 35c and be satisfied.

But the heart of any mag, the stories, are a different story. They ain't so hot. The Oct. issue had an average of only 2 15/16 out of a possible 5. I expect at least 3 1/2 from any mag I buy. But the stories are readable, at least. They are not hack, and they are not good.

That's all for now. Keep everything the way it is except the quality of the stories.

3437 Vaux St.
Philadelphia, Pa.

So you like everything about the magazine but the stories! We'll have to do something about that. What do you think of the line-up for this issue with names like Sturgeon, Bailey, Muller, Keller, Russell, Tanner, Anderson, and Reynolds gracing the contents of the page?

Albert M. McFarlane

Both Other Worlds and Imagination are definitely mature publications in the stf field and you are to be congratulated for the generally high level maintained in your stories and illustrations.

I have noticed that Amazing is embroiled in quite a bit of criticism over the half-nude pictures that frequently adorn its covers and which generally are not consistant with any of the details of the story they purport to illustrate. Your adult readers buy stf for relaxation and some intelligent information on our variable future. Your covers conform to

(*Continued on page* 157)

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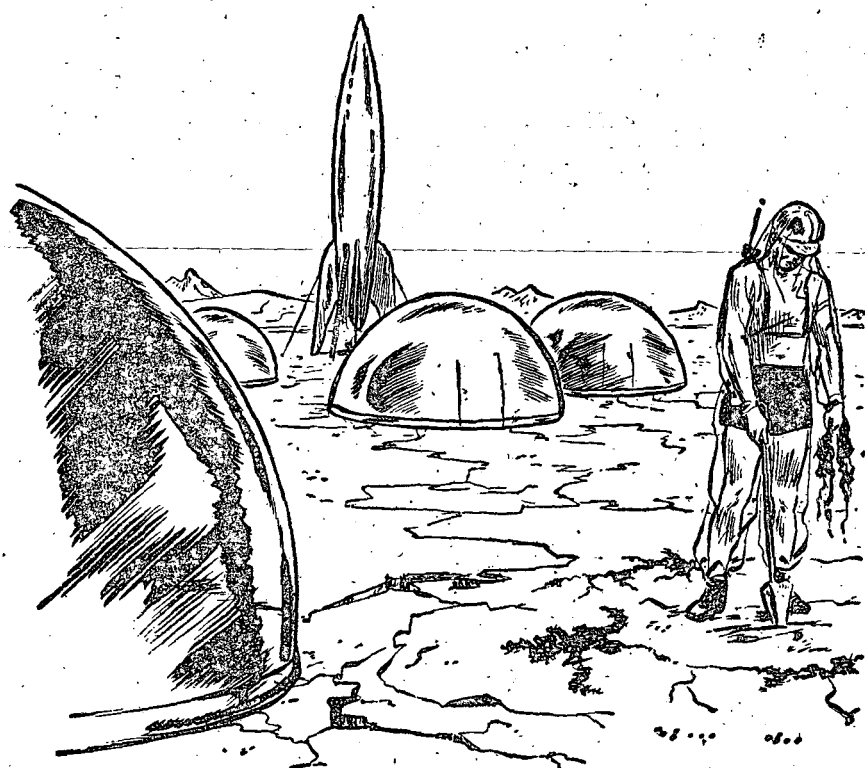

THE SOLUTION

By William C. Bailey

When young Pinky Lane returned to Castor, he was considered fair game by everyone at the Casino. Pinky, however, had learned his lesson the first time and now had a few plans of his own.

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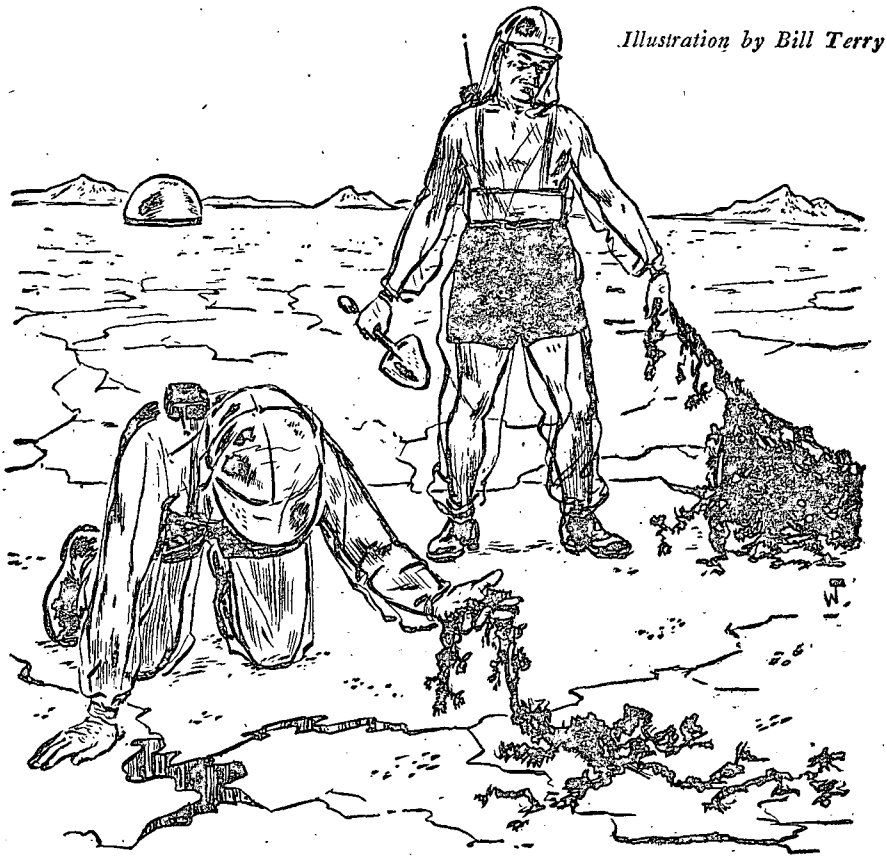
Illustration by Bill Terry



IT was still dark when Pinky Lane reached the hotel. Castor had turned its back on the sun, and the rippling of the temblors said Pollux was not due to rise for an hour. The rain flew in solid horizontal sheets as the wet planet's atmosphere rushed in its regular tidal movement toward its satellite twin.

Pinky scarcely gave the hotel a glance. The weird, mushroom-cap architecture of Castor, so functionally adapted to its unique conditions, had lost its fascination for him. As in all the Dutch colonies, the Holland House had a big book for registering guests to sign. Pinky filled in the first empty line with a quick scrawl:

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"Pinkland Lane, age 27, single, birthplace Centaurus III, occupation engineer." He could not help but read the previous entry: "Joseph Bayuk, age 55, widower, birthplace Sol III, occupation tango dancer." He grunted briefly at the joke of it, and slung his dripping slicker to the "front boy."

Turning to pick up his bags and go to his room, he saw Bart coming purposefully toward him across the lobby. A particularly sharp earth shock made the hotel owner lurch and catch himself, grinning wryly at the red-headed engineer. The bulging silica-gel walls heaved and wriggled, and the floor rippled queasily as the soft quicksand on which the hotel floated yielded with the quake.

"Pollux'll be up in a little while," Bart told Lane huskily. "Well, kid, I never thought I'd see you back here, not after the rooking you got."

Lane reached down to shake the gambler's outstretched hand. "Hello, Mr. Bartalucia," he said, blushing to the tips of his ears. "And you can bet I never wanted to come back, either. I've had enough of the Twin Planets to last a lifetime."

Bart's husky croupier's voice laughed with soft understanding. "Tough break for a young pup," he agreed. "Come on, I'll buy you a drink."

Pinky followed Bart's lithe walk across the fluttery ripples of the floor into the Casino. Play was slow. Freddy was dealing black jack to a new stickman, recognizable as a crap dealer by his short black apron. They gave him the cool, indifferent eye that every player sooner or later gets to know.

There was a new bartender, too, Lane noticed. Things never stood still on Castor, in more ways than one. The sharpest shock of the oncoming land tide swayed the whole ballooning structure to emphasize his thought. Automatically both Bart and Pinky steadied themselves with a hand against the bar.

It was a royal fizz for Bart. It always was. Pinky joined him in the drink.

"All right, Pinky," Bart said, as he set his glass on the bar. "How come you're back?" Pinky's fair young features colored again in an embarrassed blush.

"I came back to get my pay, Mr. Bartalucia," he said diffidently. "My father nearly took my head off when he heard about it. He said no gang of crooked promoters backed by a tin-horn gambler could do that to a son of his."

Bart's sharp eyes were veiled by half-drawn lids. "Your father says some pretty rough things," he breathed softly.

"Yes, Mr. Bartalucia," Pinky replied. "I hope you don't take it personally, of course. He's like that. You know I don't feel that way myself. It's just that my father raised so much hell I *had* to come back. No matter *what* you people do to me." He swallowed nerv-

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ously.

"I don't know what you're talking about, of course," Bart told him quietly. "You're a nice clean kid, Pinky, and you shouldn't hang aroung a hole like this. So far you've been lucky, but you shouldn't stretch it."

"Lucky?" Pinky said nervously.

"Yeah. Lucky I don't get sore at you for being so damned honest in repeating the things your old man says. It would be a shame if the boys had to give you a mud bath."

Pinky had a quick unhappy realization of what it would be like to flounder deeper and deeper into the bottomless quicksand. He could not mistake the icy threat.

BEFORE Pinky could reply, there was a little ripple of activity at the tables.

A short, pot-bellied man dressed in cool, well-tailored nylon, had breezed into the Casino. He waved his cigar cheerily to Bart and walked to where Freddy was still dealing to the new stickman. His bald scalp glistened in the overhead lights. Fat jowls creased in the happiest of grins. He threw a bill on the table and called for chips.

"The tango dancer," Bart snorted huskily.

"New here?" Pinky asked, glad to change the subject.

"Yeah. Just blew in. Has the room right across from you. Retired banker or something. Seeing the world. Says he gets a kick out of rubbing elbows with the seamy side of life. He's too honest, too, Pinky."

Laughter broke out at the black jack table as Bayuk, the tango dancer, sat down. The idle stickman rose slowly to his feet, took off his black apron and folded it carefully over the back of the stool next to Bayuk. He drifted away like smoke.

"Thanks for the drink, Mr. Bartalucia," Pinky told the gambler. He got up and started from the bar.

"Pinky!" Bart called after him. The Centaurian stopped.

"Yes?"

"Oh, all right. Go ahead. It's all right."

Pinky shrugged mentally and walked to his room.

A quick succession of quakes threw him against the yielding silica-gel wall of the corridor. The hotel rode with the blow, its mushroom-cap shape sagging and recoiling sluggishly. The "give" of the building sprang several doors open in the corridor. Pinky was left standing with an unneeded key in his hand. A sound behind him made him whirl. He was embarrassed to see the new stickman standing inside the tango dancer's room, a tiny flashlight in his hand, obviously surprised in the act of rifling the newcomer's luggage.

"Hello," Pinky said solemnly. It was a rather hard place to make conversation. The other nodded

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with one quick jerk of his head. The light in his hand went out. The hotel sagged and swayed again, and the door of Bayuk's room swung shut, cutting off Pinky's view of the other. He didn't like it. But maybe Bart felt he had to know who his guests really were.

WITH the sketchy contents of his bags stowed in the dresser, Lane returned to the Casino. Bayuk was still at the black jack table, apparently winning. Another player had come in, a thin, rat-faced little man, whose soiled and wrinkled seersucker hung limp and ill-fitting on his skimpy body.

Pinky hitched his big frame onto the straddle-legged stool next to the tango dancer and bought fifty chips. They played silently for a while, giving Freddy a pretty good run for his money. Bayuk was betting with yellow ten-guilder chips. The unkempt, nervous stranger in seersucker played singles, as did Pinky.

Freddy shuffled deftly, but bent a card. He turned cooly behind him to get a fresh deck. Lane seized the opportunity to lean close to the tango dancer.

"Mr. Bayuk?" he whispered softly.

The jowly Terrestrial turned his beaming face toward him, removing the cigar from his fat lips. "Yes?" he said.

"I'm not trying to be nosey," he said, blushing. "But have you any idea why the other dealer is searching your room?"

Bayuk's face never lost its grin. "I don't," he replied cheerfully. "I'd like to know what he makes of five pounds of dirty linen, though. That, some clean shirts, a couple suits and three pair of shoes are all he'll find." His eyes were owlish and inscrutable behind the horn-rims.

The third man on the player's side of the table appeared to pay no notice to the conversation. He was sweating heavily, mopping the trickling beads from his pocked and pitted face with the back of his hand.

"Just thought you might care," Pinky said, somehow hurt that the other took the matter so lightly. He turned back to the dealer as Freddy broke open the new pack. The game seemed to pick up. A kind of electric tension was more and more noticeable in the air. Pinky swallowed and heard his ears pop. That was it, he knew. Rising Pollux was dragging a great bubble of Castor's atmosphere with him, the wild air-tide of the rainy planet. Atmospheric pressure was increasing palpably. They were all getting a little oxygen drunk. He remembered to temper his bets. In an hour or so Castor's twin would pass the zenith and the pressure would start to fall again. In a few days he would be used to it again.

The added pressure made it hotter. Sweat ran more and more

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heavily from the rat-faced player's face. With a muffled curse he pulled a wadded, disreputably filthy handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his pocked features. From the corner of his eye Pinky saw a slip of paper drop to the undulating floor. His natural politeness was about to make him call the other's attention to it, but a sharp dig in his ribs from Bayuk's elbow quieted him for an instant. Risking and losing his last chip, the skinny man wriggled off his stool and walked jerkily across the swaying floor to the bar. Bayuk slipped one fat haunch off the padded seat and picked up what had been dropped. It disappeared within the side pocket of his coat without creating a ripple of interest from its loser or from the dealer.

"Enough of this," the bald Terrestrial said happily, after a couple more hands. He pressed the fire from his cigar butt. "Come along, young fellow. I'll buy you a drink."

IT was a gin fizz this time. All the Dutch ever drank was gin, Pinky decided.

"First today," said Bayuk raising his glass.

"Mud in your eye," Pinky told him, a little ill at ease with a stranger. "Plenty of it, here on Castor."

"Quite a place," the Terrestrial nodded vigorously. "And what people!" His fat lips split in a delighted grin.

"I don't find them so very funny," Lane confessed.

"Come, come," Bayuk told him. "They're more fun than you'll have in a century back home. Have you ever been on Earth?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I did my graduate work at Colorado School of Mines."

"Well, you know what it is back there," Bayuk said. "All my life I sat around an office, all duded up, so polite, so nice, so genteel. I never saw a crook that I can remember until I retired."

"You're retired?"

"I'll say I am," the other said joyfully, bouncing up and down as the planet writhed and heaved beneath them. I'm seeing the Galaxy. And not just the tourist spots. I get the kick of my life rubbing elbows with people like these." The flash of diamonds on his hand took them all in, but somehow seemed to exclude Pinky.

"You don't count me as one of them, eh?" he observed.

"Don't be silly," Bayuk protested, rapping his glass on the bar for a refill. "These shoddy outcasts all have that look about them. What of that seedy looking shill who just left? Didn't he look the part?"

"The one who dropped the paper?" the big redhead reminded him, his blond features turning bright pink.

"Yes. That one. That was the house's money he was playing with. Or else they put it on the tab. A

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regular, you can tell it." He stopped, but Pinky's embarrassed, questioning frown forced him on.

"Oh, yes," he said. "The paper. Perhaps you think I should have returned it? Well, had *you* dropped it, I would have done so. But that character, no." He reached into his coat and removed the soiled and wrinkled sheet from his pocket. It was limp with sweat, crumpled and soiled. A huge diamond flashed on his fat fingers as he carefully spread it on the bar.

"Copy of a radiogram," Lane told him.

"Yes," Bayuk agreed. "But read it."

Lane frowned at the message. The address had been torn off. Only the first word of the text made any sense. It read: "TELEGRAPH TSOOA MOGES HRYEO UITKX MBOLN LRTIA RHONA LYSCI ODCDC AENGL ASOAN SGATH ELOLI AKULI NDUCK ACIIP CURST CESNT EOWLD CCFPW UEOSE NNTPL ITNLG TCNHH GLURU UNFLA LDIFR."

"The jack-pot," Bayuk gloated. "We bought ourselves something What's your name, son?"

"Lane, Mr. Bayuk," the engineer said, swallowing. "Pinkland Lane. They call me Pinky."

"I don't wonder," Bayuk laughed, showing large, tobacco-stained teeth. "With that hair, and the way you blush every time you open your mouth." He was instantly contrite. "I'm sorry," he said, on seeing Pinky's face flame red, and sounding as if he meant it. "Not a very good joke, eh, Pinky?"

The redhead frowned at the enciphered message. "I wonder," he said. "Could it be that simple?"

"You mean you understand it?" Bayuk whispered excitedly.

"No, but perhaps I can decipher it." Pinky declared. He sketched a simple diagram on the back of an opened letter he found in a pocket.

"Let me see it," Bayuk insisted. He looked over Pinky's work:

T	E	L	E	G	R	A	P	H
9	2	6	3	4	8	1	7	5
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
G	U	A	R	A	N	T	E	E
L	I	C	H	E	N	S	O	L
U	T	I	O	N	T	O	W	O
R	K	I	N	G	P	O	L	L
U	X	P	A	L	L	A	D	I
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
U	M	C	L	A	I	M	C	A
N	B	U	Y	S	T	O	C	K
F	O	R	S	O	N	G	F	U
L	L	S	C	A	L	E	P	L
A	N	T	I	N	G	S	W	I
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
L	L	C	O	S	T	H	U	N
D	R	E	D	G	C	R	E	D
I	T	S	C	A	N	Y	O	U
F	I	N	D	T	H	E	S	C
R	A	T	C	H	O	E	K	
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Pinky copied the message in linear style:

"TELEGRAM GUARANTEE LICHEN SOLUTION TO WORKING POLLUX PALLADIUM

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CLAIM CAN BUY STOCK FOR SONG FULL SCALE PLANTINGS WILL COST HUNDRED G CREDITS CAN YOU FIND THE SCRATCH HOEK."

"Now, that makes some sense," Bayuk gloated, straightening. "How did you ever figure it out?"

"Simple columnar transposition," Pinky said, embarrassed at his quick success. "That first word *en clair* would be a tip-off to anybody who had ever played with ciphers."

"It doesn't look simple to me," Bayuk admired. "Damned clever, Pinky!"

"Not really," he disagreed. "Shucks, you'd almost think they wanted somebody to dope it out, using that simple a cipher. Anyway, they're in for a big surprise about the stock."

Bayuk digested the implication of Pinky's statement for a moment. "Do you know what this is about?" he demanded.

"Funny, isn't it?" Pinky agreed. "But I do."

"Well?" Bayuk insisted. The Casino heaved and its walls writhed insubstantially. They both steadied themselves against the bar.

PINKY looked at the Terrestrial speculatively. After all, maybe this was the break he needed to recoup the salary he had never been paid. A quick sale of his stock for ten thousand credits would square that account. And he certainly could use a friend on a hell-hole like Castor, where every outcast was at the throat of every other. He and Bayuk were probably the only two men on the planet who weren't fugitives from some form of justice. Take a chance, he decided, his stomach fluttering nervously.

"Remember that ratty little guy, the one you called a shill?"

"Yes," Bayuk recalled, nodding vigorously.

"Well, that's Hoek, the guy who sent this radiogram. He's a character around here. A sneaky crook, if there ever was one. Sort of a confidence man. A crooked promoter."

Bayuk chuckled. "You aren't telling me a thing," he said emphatically. "One look was enough. It looks as though he's trying to promote somebody right now," the bald Terrestrial decided, fingering the message.

"That's what's funny about it," Lane protested. "He sent that message to somebody he knows. The cipher proves it. And that last phrase. He wouldn't ask if the other guy could 'find some scratch' if he was promoting somebody's confidence. It sounds more like one crook talking to another. He's still selling the same old thing, though," Pinky concluded, puzzled.

"What's that?"

"It's in the message. The lichen. He says he guarantees it's the solution to working the palladium deposits on Castor. That outfit he mentions, Pollux-Palladium, went

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bust a couple months ago trying to do it. The climate licked them."

"The climate?"

"Uh huh. Pollux is completely arid. And hot as hell. You have to live in a respirator. Men just won't stay, except at wages that bankrupt any company."

Bayuk read the deciphered message carefully again. "But Hoek says he's got that licked. I wonder what he's got?" he mused.

"I told you. His lichen."

"I don't get it."

"Hoek's famous, or should I say infamous, around here. He has some trick lichen he either found or developed that he swears will grow on Pollux. You see, if vegetation could thrive there, it would put water in the air, and make the place fit to live in. Would shield the sun, too, and lower the temperature. He claims this weird plant of his actually pulls the water of crystallization out of the rocks. There's water in them, all right. The only water there is on Pollux. It's a nice idea."

"Why don't they try it?" Bayuk demanded.

"Oh, they have, Mr. Bayuk. Three or four times. That's how that little crook makes his living. He finds some suckers who never heard of him, peddles his idea, and gets them to outfit an expedition. Of course his lichens die. They may make a little water, but not enough, and they dry out in the arid atmosphere on Pollux. You can't imagine what it's like unless you've been there. One breath of that stuff just about takes the lungs right out of you. You sweat and it feels like you're getting an alcohol rub, and all the time the sun is burning the skin off you."

"But, Pinky," Bayuk gasped, getting the picture. "Don't you see what this radiogram means? Hoek has made his process, whatever it is, work after all! He's apparently going to try it on his own! Do you suppose he really could have done it?"

"That's what he says," Pinky said. "Well, we'll find out soon enough, if he's really trying to corner the stock. I own a big slice myself. That's all I ever got for working for them."

"*You* worked for them?"

"Yes. That's why I'm here, really. When they went broke they stuck me for my pay, so I got a judgment against the unissued treasury stock of the company. I'm trying to get some cash for it now."

Bayuk spread his hands. "Why, it's tailor-made," he cried. "You're a cinch!"

"Not that easy," the big Centaurian protested. "Hoek hasn't any dough. His radiogram asks for money. Trying to make a deal with him would be borrowing trouble. I'd sure like to know where Bart fits in this."

"Bart!" Bayuk exclaimed. "You mean our host?"

"Sure. I hate to call him a master

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mind, because it's not that sort of thing, but nobody has a grift around here unless Bart gets his cut."

"Good grief!" Bayuk gasped. "*You've* certainly been around, young man!" Pinky blushed modestly, unable to help a little glow of pleasure at the words.

"Well," Bayuk went on. "Play it smart. Wait for them to come to you."

IT was a short wait. Pinky had his breakfast brought into the bar the next morning and ate it perched on one of the temblorproof stools. The low barometer of low tide gave him a dead feeling. In the coolness of the reduced pressure he shivered, conscious of the clammy wetness of Castor. He suddenly realized that Bart had silently seated himself beside him.

"Good morning, Mr. Bartalucia," Pinky greeted him, flushing at the other's icily detached survey.

"You ought to go home," Bart said huskily.

"I want to," Pinky said. "Really I do. But not till I've got some dough in my jeans. You ought to meet my father. He's . . . "

"He's a punk," Bart sneered. "You should see the characters who are stooging around here with their tongues hanging out for you. They'll gobble you up in one bite."

"Who?" Pinky asked.

Bart's head made the slightest motion toward the lobby. "A little rat. A hurt rat. A vicious one, Pinky. Go home, I tell you, kid. They'll take your pants."

"Who?"

"A little Dutch sneak from Three," Bart said in his oddly carrying whisper. "A sly little fraud named Hoek. He's poison, Pinky, and he's asking for you. Beat it, kid!"

Pinky finished the limp-yolked eggs. "I'll see him," he said.

"All right. So I told you," Bart said, apparently washing his hands of the matter. His light touch restrained Pinky as the Centaurian made to leave. "One thing," he said, as if it were an afterthought.

"Yes, Mr. Bartalucia?"

"I hear you met my new stickman sort of *al fresco* last night."

"Oh. Him. Yes, Mr. Bartalucia, we met."

"That wouldn't explain how you and the tango dancer got so friendly so quick, would it?"

Pinky felt his cheeks redden and burn. He would never make a liar. But he tried. It was pretty weak, he guessed. "Oh, no. He's a Terrestrial. I went to school on Earth, Mr. Bartalucia. We just got talking."

"Do you mind forgetting about meeting him?" he asked with that pithy hint of a mud bath in his voice.

Pinky tried to ape the gambler's casual shrug. "Why not?" he replied. "He's your pigeon."

"That's better," Bart breathed.

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Some unseen signal of his head brought Hoek into the Casino. He walked with a jittery twitch across the almost motionless floor, twice as unappetizing in the cold clamminess of low tide. His seersucker said he had slept in it. His stringy tie was pulled away from his collar, and the top button of his shirt was unfastened, showing a sallow, dirty expanse of neck. Bart drifted.

Pinky started it. "I hear you're looking for me, Mr. Hoek," he told him.

"I am, Meinheer," Hoek said quickly, in a high-pitched, strained voice. "Nothing important. Just heard you were around."

"You heard right," Pinky said, trying to keep cool.

"Sorry to hear about it," Hoek said lamely. "About your not getting paid, I mean."

"I'll bet," Pinky said, flushing.

"I am. I really am," Hoek insisted excitedly. "See here, Meinheer, maybe you can get a little out of it at that."

"I'd like to."

"Some friends of mine, people I know, that is, are thinking of taking another try at Pollux-Palladium," he confided, his lips close to Pinky's tingling ear. His breath was dead and fetid with the memories of gin.

"Suckers," Pinky commented, drawing away from the other's reek.

"They might be interested in picking up your stock," Hoek told him, drawing close again.

"Let's make it easy," Pinky suggested. "I read the radio you sent yesterday."

Hoek was plainly startled. "That Bart!" he gasped. Pinky let that one ride.

"All right," the engineer insisted. "So you think your screwy lichen will make water on Pollux after all. And you want my stock."

"Yes."

"What for? Pollux-Palladium went bust."

"No mining, Meinheer," Hoek insisted. "But listen! Pollux-Palladium has rights which really tie the whole planet up! They had a terrific concession. I hear they bribed . . ." He stopped.

"Now, Mr. Hoek," Pinky protested. "You know you can't bribe the Dutch. *You* never could."

"I know. I know," he whispered intensely. "I would have *sworn* it could not be done. But did you ever read that concession? There were millions in the Corporation. It went somewhere, you know that."

"Somewhere else, that's a cinch," Pinky admitted. "But what of it?"

"Let me get my hands on that stock," Hoek promised. "Just so I control the planet. We'll plant my lichen—it will grow like wildfire. As soon as they see it is making water, the stock will be worth billions!"

"Nice point," said Pinky. "All right, Hoek, I'll sell you mine."

"Good!" the other exclaimed. "I can't pay you much, you under-

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stand . . ."

"Oh, but you'll have to," Pinky insisted. "You said it would be worth billions."

"Oh, no, Meinheer, that's only if it all works out;" Hoek protested.

"It might be better if I just kept the stock," Pinky suggested, hunching his broad shoulders over the bar.

"Oh, but my partners, I don't think they'd like an outsider. You might not approve our policies."

"Listen, if the thing'll pan out, I'll approve them," Pinky insisted. "Let me take a look at your lichen." Hoek shrugged. With a hint something less than subtle that he had to get in touch with his principals by radiogram before going any farther, Hoek arranged to pick Pinky up following the noon meal.

NO sooner had he sidled away from the bar with his jittery, twitchy step, than Bayuk appeared from the lobby.

"It didn't take long," he said to the big redhead.

"How'd your room look?" Pinky asked.

"An expert job," Bayuk told him. "I'd never have guessed." He reached out tentatively with his left hand as the floor gave a slow heave, like a giant, ponderous hiccup. "Is it starting again?" he asked.

Pinky raised an indifferent eye. "Not for a while," he said. "Transmitted shocks, that's all we'll get for the next couple hours." He swung his eyes around the bar. Neither the bartender nor any of the dealers was paying them any attention. "Mr. Bayuk," Pinky said softly. "Hoek fell all over his feet trying to buy my stock. I got him to tell me what it's all about. Maybe this is the McCoy."

"How can you find out?" Bayuk asked.

"I'm going to his laboratory after lunch. He'll show me."

Bayuk's face lighted with a fierce, restrained grin. "Take me with you!" he insisted.

"Oh, I can't," Pinky protested, reddening. "He's all googly over the idea of letting even one outsider in."

"Nobody with money is an outsider," Bayuk said flatly. "And I've got it. Don't be a fool, Pinky. You'll need dough!"

THE tide was backing and filling when Hoek came for Pinky. Rough blustery gusts rushed aimlessly east and west as the atmosphere first yielded to the continuing swirl of air following Pollux on around Castor and then eddied back, drawn by the more powerful attraction to the east, where the dry planet would soon rise. Rain no longer fell, but gust-borne droplets still smacked wetly against the face. The towering, incredible cumulus were replaced by a low-flying scud that was running in all directions at once with the turn of the tide. Patches of blue blazed daz-

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zlingly through the broken cloud cover, revealing first the ardent disc of Berius, and then, betimes, the hard, tiny discs of the other Dutch Cluster suns near enough to be visible in daylight.

The ground outside the pool of quicksand on which the Holland House floated was firmer. Even the blurred, indistinct earth shocks of the land-tide's neap hit one in the knees.

Hoek pulled his slicker tighter about his limp and wrinkled seersucker. "What's this?" he said excitedly, glaring at Bayuk.

"My principals," Pinky explained. It didn't take.

"The money, chum," Bayuk grinned, rolling his cigar to the other corner of his fat lips. That did it.

Hoek's place was easy walking distance. The laboratory was at least as dank, foul and unkempt as the botanist himself. It stank mightily, a wet, mouldy reek, miasmic and unclean. He recognized it himself.

"The algae," he said. "They smell a little."

"Algae?" Bayuk asked. "I thought it was lichen."

"Lichen is symbiotic," Pinky explained absently. "A fungus and a green algae living together."

The demonstration lay in the center of the floor. Hoek had brought in a flat slab of sandstone and laid it on the gel. It was streaked with rivulets of rusty water. In its center a black, foul, spongy mass of rotten stuff quaked and rippled in sympathy with the shocks of the incoming tide.

"Is that it?" Pinky said, unable to restrain his distaste.

"The wonder plant," Hoek breathed in awe.

"It smells to high Heaven," Bayuk gasped.

Hoek grinned. "It's worth it," he said. "See that water?"

"Sure," Pinky said. "I see it. What of it? How do you know it doesn't come from the atmosphere?"

Hoek's ferile teeth flashed brownly with his acid grin. "Wait, Meinheer!" he cried. Pinky could not restrain a sickened writhing in his stomach as the dirty little Dutchman plunged his hands into the nauseous mass. He pushed it to one side, and exposed the sandstone on which it had rested. Rising, he seized a pail of water and flushed away the rusty streak of slime that covered the portion of the slab he had just exposed. There was a noticeable pit or depression in the stone.

"It has done that in an hour," he cried shrilly. "The rock has been broken down into an impalpable powder by the acid. The water of crystallization is gone—the crystals have collapsed."

Jumping up nervously, and steadying himself against a solid, heaving temblor that swayed the walls of his laboratory, he picked

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up a hammer and chisel. Quickly he knocked a dozen chips out of the eroded portion of the slab. With no sign of distaste, he scooped the spongy blackness of the lichen back into the depression.

"Just a few minutes," he promised. "Those chips will be eaten clean away." The performance was as good as he promised.

"How come you can put your hand in that stuff?" Pinky demanded as Hoek scooped the plant aside again. "If it's so water hungry, why doesn't it dehydrate your hand?"

Hoek winked. "That's the miracle of lichens," he said. "They grow on stone, no? And on any kind of stone, yes? But for each different mineral the fungus secretes a different acid, tailored to fit that one mineral. It may etch others, of course, but not very dissimilar ones. My flesh is not even touched by this orange stuff. On marble, the acid is more red. On bauxite, almost yellow."

PINKY knelt and laid his hand against the wet, etched slab. He pressed his palm tighter and held it there. "You damned cheat," he breathed softly. Hoek shrank back against a table, taking a new hand-hold against the regular rippling of the mud.

"No!" he exclaimed. "It *does* work, you fool!"

"Then why are you heating the slab?" Pinky demanded angrily. "You have heating coils buried under it!"

He heard the swift intake of Bayuk's breath. The bald financier's face had suddenly hardened.

"Certainly," Hoek cried shrilly. "Isn't Pollux hot?"

"Um," Pinky said thoughtfully, reaching out for a hold as he straightened slowly. "That's true. But of course, you'd have to heat it." He looked in long thoughtfulness at the slab.

"Does it make water fast enough?" he asked.

"Fast enough for what?"

"To resist evaporation on Pollux?"

"Yes. I have calculated these things. You would like to see my figures?"

"I guess not," Pinky said. "The other figures come first."

"The other figures?"

"The money," Bayuk chimed in softly.

"Let's get out of the smell," Hoek said. He gave them gin and no chaser. "Something is going on," he said, once they were seated.

"Like what?" Bayuk asked.

"Somebody else is buying stock, Meinheer," Hoek said. "My backers won't touch it unless we control it all."

"Spell it out," Pinky suggested. "Who has how much?"

Hoek shrugged. "There were seven hundred thousand shares," he said. "You've got a couple hundred thousand, and I've got a little more than that. Not enough for control,

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though."

"Exactly how much have you got?" Bayuk demanded.

Hoek glared at him angrily. "Why should I tell you?" he asked. Then, "All right. Two hundred forty thousand shares."

"Then we have it all," Bayuk said, beaming behind his glasses.

Pinky twisted his big frame to look at him. "You've been buying?" he demanded.

"Why not? Cheap enough," Bayuk said. "Bart got it for me. Two hundred sixty thousand shares. That accounts for all of it."

Hoek was on his feet, striding twitchily back and forth. "This queers the deal," he protested. "My backers won't touch it with you in it."

"No problem," Bayuk told him. "Deal them out. How much were they plunging for?"

Hoek eyed him like a ferret. "You'd take their place, Meinheer?" he asked.

"I'm suggesting it," Bayuk grinned flatly. "Pinky told you I was the money end."

"Why not?" Hoek shrugged. "It's their tough luck. They said they'd come in for two hundred thousand credits."

Bayuk shook his head.

"What do you mean?" Hoek demanded.

"*One* hundred thousand," Bayuk said pointedly.

"No!" Hoek protested. "They . . . "

"Oh, stow it," Pinky said irritably. "He's seen the radiogram, too."

The little Dutchman shrugged fatalistically. "It is true," he said. "I need a hundred thousand." He gauged Bayuk with his red-rimmed eyes. "You'll come in for that, Meinheer?"

"I might like to," Bayuk grinned. "But I can't. I haven't got it."

"How come?" Pinky asked, and instantly blushed his embarrassment. "I thought you were loaded!"

"On Earth, certainly. Or give me six months to convert some assets and arrange the transfer, yes, I'd be good for a million. I've got my roll with me. That's the nut." He carefully unbuttoned his shirt and disclosed a money belt strapped around his fat middle. He took the new, mint fresh bills from its outlet.

"Guilders," Hoek said.

"Of course. I had them changed on Berius III," Bayuk told him. "A little better than a hundred thousand," he said, without counting the money.

"Not enough," Hoek frowned. "It will take a hundred thousand credits. That's nearly two hundred fifty thousand guilders."

"But what about you?" Bayuk demanded. "What do you put in?"

"I can almost match you," Hoek said despondently. "Still not enough." Their eyes jointly sought Pinky.

"Me?" the Centaurian gasped.

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"Gosh, don't look at me, Mr. Bayuk," he said awkwardly. "I'm here to *get* some money, remember? I've only got a couple thousand guilders."

"Sometimes it takes money to get money," Bayuk observed. "And I thought I was smart not to carry too much with me!" He cursed his shortsightedness. "I never thought I'd see anything I'd want to get in on," he confessed.

"How about Bart?" Pinky suggested desperately.

"Not me!" Bayuk snapped in concert with Hoek's anguished, "No!"

Pinky reddened at their vehemence. This was the plunge. "All right," he decided. "I'll fire an eldogram to Dad. Maybe he'll come across." The very thought of asking his father for forty thousand credits made his stomach crawl.

BART brought a copy of the outgoing eldogram to the bar before dinner.

"Where did you get that? Do you see everything?" the big redhead asked, feeling his ears burn with anger.

Bart shrugged. "Everything important. Especially anything going outside the Cluster. You sucker," he said bitterly. He read the message in his husky voice. "WONDERFUL CHANCE TO RECOUP MY LOSS AND GET IN ON GROUND FLOOR. NEED FORTY THOUSAND CREDITS AT ONCE. PLEASE TRUST MY JUDGMENT AND CONFIRM BY ELDOGRAM THAT CREDITS FORTHCOMING." He looked at the young engineer pityingly. "Don't you know how these things work?" he demanded. "Nobody will pay on an eldogram trickling in from out in space somewhere. You'll have to wait for the documents. It'll take weeks."

Pinky swallowed. "Mr. Bayuk had an idea," he offered diffidently.

"I'll bet," Bart said sourly.

"He thought maybe you'd advance me the money," Pinky said, blushing furiously. "You know me, Mr. Bartalucia."

"Sure I do, kid," Bart grinned. "I know you for a natural-born sucker. Why should I let you take me?"

"I guess I haven't got any answer for that," he replied.

"What the devil," Bart went on. "It wouldn't be so bad if I didn't know that sneak Hoek was taking you for it. You'll lose your shirt and then figure the only way to keep your old man from finding out about it is to welch on me. And that'll make me think I've got to give you a mud bath."

"I don't do those things," Pinky protested miserably, his head hanging on his chest.

"Maybe you don't," said Bart. "Maybe if you get taken good and proper, your old man will drag you home. Okay, kid. I'll ride on his eldogram. You get the dough."

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"But we'll have to wait to see what he says," Pinky reminded him.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," Bart said with elaborate casualness, pulling an envelope from his pocket. "He already said okay. Here's his eldogram,"

Pinky opened it. It didn't make him feel any better. He read it: "TRANSFERRING FORTY THOUSAND CREDITS YOUR ACCOUNT PLANETARY BANK OF BERIUS III. CAN'T FEEL MUCH WORSE THINKING YOU SUCKER FOR FIFTY THOUSAND THAN TEN THOUSAND CREDITS. PLEASE WRITE. DAD."

Pinky raised his flaming face. "Do me a favor, Mr. Bartalucia," he asked.

"What?"

"Don't let on about this. I mean, about your advancing me the money. I'll tell them you wouldn't help, or maybe I'll say we have to wait for the documents."

Bart looked at him curiously. "Now, that's the first sensible thing I've ever heard you say," he declared. "You realize that means you'll have to move in with Hoek?

Pinky frowned. "What makes you think that?" he asked.

Bart shook his head pityingly. "For a minute there I thought you knew what you were doing," he said sadly.

"Gosh, I hope I do," Pinky replied earnestly. "I admit I don't trust Mr. Hoek very far."

"Even that's too much," Bart told him dryly.

THE big redhead promptly told Bayuk about the message from his father. The Terrestrial grinned fatly. "Okay," he said. "If you plunge, so do I. Just one thing."

"What's that?"

"I'm handing my roll to Hoek, keeping just enough to live on and get back home if this thing goes bust. He'll have to handle the detail. He's done it before. But while we wait for your money to come from Centaurus, I want you to hang on to that Dutchman like a leech. Move in with him. You know we can't trust him. You told me his history yourself."

Pinky agreed with a brief nod. He was too surprised at the accuracy of Bart's prediction to trust his never too reliable voice.

Moving in with Hoek was no fun. They were too busy preparing their equipment for Pinky to mind the Dutchman's filth.

Hoek had arranged for a freighter to haul them the few hundred thousand miles across space to the arid twin. "It took nearly everything we have," he protested. "They wanted a hundred fifty thousand guilders for the two trips. In advance."

Pinky could scarcely believe the price. "Where do they get that stuff?" he demanded. "Let's radio Three for a ship. We don't have

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to use a local gyp-outfit."

"No good, Meinheer," Hoek said, yanking his stringy tie farther from his grimy neck. "Nothing flies here without Bart's okay. The price is high so he can get a cut. It would make no difference who hauled us."

Pinky was sufficiently disturbed about what Hoek had told him to leave the unkempt Dutchman for the first time since Bayuk had surrendered his bankroll. He collared Bart in his usual spot at the bar. A few players were at the tables. The click of chips sounded soft accompaniment to the chanting of the crap dealer.

"See here, Mr. Bartalucia," Pinky burst out the moment he saw him.

"Slow down," Bart snapped, his sallow face darkening. "Back up and start again."

Pinky gulped. "I'm sorry," he said in a low voice. He took a deep breath. The floor rocked, rattling glassware behind the bar.

"About that advance, Mr. Bartalucia," Pinky said at last. "Maybe I don't want to take it down after all."

"Things going queer?" Bart suggested.

"Yes, Mr. Bartalucia. Very queer. They tell me you've cut yourself in for a big slice of our transportation cost. Is that true?"

Bart's swarthy features paled. His thin brown lips faded as he compressed them against his even teeth. "Pinky," he breathed. "The things you say. I've shot men for less."

"I'm still sorry," Pinky said earnestly. "I'm not very good about these things. It's just that I've got to be sure."

The gambler regarded him through narrowed eyes. "Sonny, the things people say I do! Don't believe them."

His somehow equivocal reply left Pinky quiet and thoughtful. "I'd be satisfied with that," he said at last. "If you told me how you knew I would move in with Hoek."

"You haven't figured that out yet?" Bart demanded, obviously surprised.

"No."

"Then go home, kid. You're too light for this work."

Pinky shook his head. "I can handle Hoek," he replied. "Just so I don't have to watch you, too. All right. I'll take the guilders."

THE three of them stood in their respirators on Pollux's burning hot surface. All about them on the glistening gypsum that had fed the venture with water loomed the abandoned equipment of Pollux-Palladium, Ltd. The white bubbles that were the silica gel barracks still huddled together, and the long, skeletal arm of a jetisoned dragline whipped springily with the recurrent land shocks. Pinky could see stars twinkling feebly through its open structure, stars that shone all day in Pollux's waterless, violet sky. They were pale and weak beside the

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tiny, merciless brilliance of the Cluster suns.

It was day, and Berius' too-large disk seared them from a scant fifty million miles. The very air vibrated with the intensity of the sun's radiation, with all its unfiltered ultraviolet. Pinky turned to look at the deeply tinted helmets on the respirators of the other two.

They were an oddly assorted pair. Bayuk, his paunch all the more evident in the all-enveloping thinness of his sun-proof jumper, seemed the more grotesquely out of place. His bandy-leggedness was twice as noticeable.

A sharp earth shock sent their pile of gear clattering down. He heard Bayuk cry out. This was something else again. Pollux was no gooey, flexible mudball, like water-soaked Castor. The rock was solid, and the temblors gave you a ringing, nasty shock. Only the mushroom-cap barracks, floating on pools of mercury, were livable when the land tide came in.

"Come on," Pinky said bitterly. "We might have known they would welch. We'll stow it ourselves."

Their gear had been dumped unceremoniously on the hard gypsum in spite of a contract that called for the freighter's crew to stow the frozen food in the lockers, and lug their laboratory equipment to the site Hoek selected.

Pinky unconsciously put himself in command. "Get the food first," he ordered. "It won't stay frozen forever in this sunlight, and be careful with the radio. We'll need it."

"No," Hoek protested. "The lichen first."

Pinky gave him a scathing glance. "If it can't stand a couple hours here," he snapped. "We wasted our time."

"And money," Bayuk reminded him. He picked up a carton of frozen food. "Which way?" he asked.

Pinky pointed out one of the white, ballooning structures. "That one," he said, picking up twice the load the others could handle. "It was the last one they blew, and I don't suppose it's as filthy as the others. When the men knew they were leaving, they stopped all housekeeping. The place is a pigpen."

The wind was freshening, but its vibrant heat made it no more comfortable. The temblors quickened in tempo. Castor would soon come up over the horizon. Then it *would* get hot, Pinky remembered, as the air tide built up, compressing the atmosphere at ground level.

Bayuk slipped and sprawled under his load as the gypsum leaped resoundingly beneath his feet. You could *hear* the shocks. The whole planet cracked and groaned in protest at the vicious wrench its twin's gravity gave it. The Terrestrial was back on his feet. The coarse mineral had ripped and torn one leg of his jumper at the knee.

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"Get inside!" Pinky cried.

"I'm not hurt," Bayuk protested.

"You will be," Pinky promised. "Berius will fry your skin through that rip. Patch it."

They had their hands full for the first couple weeks. The solar generator, as yet undamaged by the quakes, soon had power at the bus bar. Charging the accumulators of one of the three scout freighters still in running order, Pinky ferried gypsum blasted from the pit to the south. Baked in their calcining kettles, it gave them water to humidify their barrack, and an adjoining bubble of silica gel which they had cleaned out to make a greenhouse. The lichen thrived on native sandstone, ferried in from some miles to the east.

They made their first planting in the same region, ringing a depression in the rock with tiny pellets of the lichen wadded with moss.

"The acid has adapted to that sandstone," Hoek explained. "The growth will take better on an identical substratum. As it spreads to the other rock, the lichen will alter the acid enough to etch the new nutrient.

THE lilttle Dutchman. who somehow managed to foul and bespatter his sun jumper as quickly as he got it on, chose nightfall for the first plantings. The air cooled noticeably at night, for Pollux' water-free atmosphere produced but little hot-house effect.

"They won't dry out so fast at night," Hoek promised. "By dawn they will have grown and pushed aside their cover glasses, and will be able to sustain themselves. By the next night, we can go back to see how they are doing. No sense working in the sun if you can help it."

Berrius' disc rose briefly for a second sunset as Pinky climbed the scout freighter toward the planting. The tubby little craft, a spaceship but for its lack of sufficient power, responded pleasingly to his fingers.

"I don't see any water," Bayuk complained, peering through the untinted helmet they wore at night.

"Of course not," Hoek scoffed. "Did you think that depression would fill in a day? This is not a miracle we are working. But wait a week!"

They grounded on a fairly level spot fifty yards from the nearest planting. Hoek scrambled dangerously over the cracked and ruptured rock toward the line of cover glasses. He threw himself on his knees, heedless of damage to his thin jumper. Pinky heard his curse, and had not yet reached the thin row of plantings before Hoek had hurled himself across the rock to where the next glass wafer glinted. They followed his agonized progress from seeding to seeding. There was no need for comment. Without exception, they had dried to a rusty black and died. All were crisp and flakey to the touch. Hoek was whimpering

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with rage. His jumper was a wreck. Blood trickled from his abraded knees.

"They died!" he shrieked, leaping up. He stumbled blindly back toward the scout.

"What happened?" Bayuk bellowed, running after him. A rippling transmitted shock threw him heavily to the arid rock. He screamed and cursed, holding his scraped elbow, but ran fatly after the little Dutchman.

Pinky sank down beside one of the plantings that Hoek had not touched. The cover glass was undisturbed. Carefully, tenderly, he lifted the dead lichen from where it had been planted. He ran his fingers over the spot where it had striven and died. The rough and crusty surface of the sandstone was smooth and slick to the touch. A tiny depression, less than an inch in diameter, had begun to form beneath the lichen in its brief span of life. A few millimeters of the rock had surrendered its water of crystallization, to the accompanying etching of the surface roughness. But the glass had not been tight—it could not be, without some sort of gasket to make it conform to the rough mineral on which the planting had been made. The dry wind had knifed in around the unprotected edges of the plant and greedily sucked away what water there had been in the seeding, and whatever other it made from the sandstone.

Each of the plantings showed the same thing. Slowly, thoughtfully, Pinky made his way back to the ship. Hoek was sobbing, his face streaming inside his respirator with tears he could not touch. Wordlessly Pinky sealed the scout, and climbed away from the depression.

THERE was no sound in the little ship except Hoek's bitter, wracking sobs. By unspoken agreement, they exchanged not a word until they were once again within the swaying walls of silica gel. Pinky closed the air-lock for the night, and turned up the humidity, as he always did after they had been in the open.

"Well?" he demanded of Hoek at last.

The wrinkled Dutchman's pitted face was dry. His narrow shoulders moved in the briefest shrug. "This damned planet has beaten me once again," he conceded bitterly. His eyes glittered wildly for a moment. "But I shall never give up!" he swore softly. "Never!"

"How about you, Bayuk?" Pinky asked.

Bayuk heaved a deep sigh. "I guess that's life," he decided, his fat face breaking into a rueful grin. "An hour ago I was worth billions! At least I get a lot of action for my money."

"You're quitting?"

"I know when I've had enough," Bayuk said, contentedly enough.

"Aren't you?" Hoek cried, his

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rat-like face drawn and tense.

"Don't you see how to make it work?" the big redhead parried.

"How do I know?" Hoek almost sobbed. "Our food will last a few months, yes. But I would need more laboratory apparatus. Perhaps one of the other strains . . ." he mused, his wasted face rapt in concentration. "But that would all take money," he went on briskly. He turned jerkily on the Centaurian. "You can get it?"

"Maybe I could," Pinky admitted. "But I don't think we need it. I know why your lichens died, Hoek. I'll have another batch growing within a week."

"Now wait a minute," Bayuk protested. "I told you I've had enough!" The gregarious friendliness had been swept from his fat features.

Looking at him thoughtfully, Pinky nodded briefly and walked across the rocking gel to their link with Castor, the interplanet radio. "Just to make sure you don't call the ship while I'm asleep," he said amiably, wrenching the driver tube from its socket. He dropped it in his jumper. "I really do know how to make this stuff grow. I'll show you in the morning. We'll know by noon."

His sudden, unexpected action had ripped away every shred of pretense. He could see plainly chiselled in Bayuk's face the thought that they were at his mercy as long as the radio's tube remained in his pocket. The welling resentment of the other two seemed to poison the air with bitterness, yes, and hate.

"This had better be good," Bayuk growled. Hoek, strangely, was equally alarmed at Pinky's obvious intention not to quit.

"Out with it!" he spat shrilly. "What can you do?"

Pinky tried to calm him with a grin. "Just remember a little basic physics," he said soothingly. "First, we'll make the planting bigger. The planting will have proportionately less surface area, and lose less by evaporation. But most important, we'll plant at dawn, not at dusk!"

"Idiot!" Hoek screamed, his frail body quivering with wrath. "The sun will wither it in a few minutes!"

Pinky shook his head sorrowfully. "And you pretend to be a scientist," he marveled. "Can't you see that yanking the water of crystallization out of rocks is an exothermic process? You can't do it without the addition of heat. Look at the gypsum we get our drinking water from. We have to heat the hell out of it to drive out the moisture. How can you possibly expect the lichen acids to pull the water out of rock without getting that heat somewhere? It does get a little water, of course. Each of your plantings at least etched the surface. But as soon as they cooled the rock some, the reaction had to quit, or it slowed down so much that the plant dried out."

"What will you do?" Hoek

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sneered. "Put a little heater coil under each lichen, as I did with the slab in my laboratory? You might as well simply calcine the water from the rocks with solar helix power!"

"That's why we plant at dawn," Pinky grinned. "The lichen is black. It will drink heat from Berius like crazy."

IT was a long night for them all. In the close confinement, the tension redoubled. Bayuk's grin was gone. His narrowed, calculating eyes were only half-shrouded by the blue wreaths of smoke from a succession of cigars.

With dawn they took the scout to the edge of the gypsum and threw a single planting on the barren rock, bereft of any protection. The splashes of moisture impelled by its fall had scarcely evaporated before fresh oozings and trickles began to stem from the plant's base. They swelled as the sun climbed the violet sky. Pinky stripped off his sun glove and felt the black, quivering mass. It was steamingly hot! Recalling that some algae could survive the heat of boiling geysers, he cheered himself that the full sun would not kill the weird growth. It battened gruesomely before their eyes. After an hour, there could be no doubt that it was thriving with an all-enveloping swiftness.

"Well?" demanded Pinky the moment they had stripped off their helmets in the barrack.

"It grows! Saints, how it grows!" Hoek replied in a spasm of emotion.

Pinky looked his question at Bayuk. The paunchy Terrestrial's fat features were an enigma. "Well, Bayuk?" he asked at length.

"What about it, Hoek?" Bayuk replied.

"Good Lord, you saw it too," Pinky protested.

"Be quiet," Bayuk told the Centaurian. "Well, Hoek, is he right?"

"How can I think otherwise?" the rat-faced Dutchman demanded. "It grew in the heat of the sun, and water streamed from it. Yes, it works."

"This changes things," Bayuk said thoughtfully, his voice oddly colored.

"Doesn't it?" Hoek mused.

"What the hell," Pinky protested. "Don't act so shocked. This is what we came here for, isn't it?"

"I thought I told you to be quiet," Bayuk growled, his glance unexpectedly level and direct.

"You told me, and I wasn't," Pinky said in a strained voice. "We've got to fix the other two scouts, and all start planting as fast as we can. Our food won't last forever."

"Well, Hoek?" Bayuk demanded again.

"I think he's right," the botanist said, his pocked face creasing with his grimace.

"All right. I stay," Bayuk said, addressing Pinky again. The Centaurian walked to the radio, the

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driver tube in his hand. He stood by it, bracing himself against the sharpening shocks of the incoming tide, his face a study of calculating emotions.

He turned back to the others, tossing the metal canister thoughtfully up and down in his hand. The strange change in Bayuk's manner troubled him. His odd way of addressing Hoek was disquieting. "I think I'll keep this a little longer," he said to them, slipping the tube back in his pocket.

Nearly five months had gone by before their instruments detected significant quantities of water vapor. Pinky's continued possession of the radio's vital part underlined the disappearance of any outward show of friendship. But they had all worked like Trojans. In long rhumb lines from their base, they had flown the three little freighters out across the arid waste of the planet, tossing out handsfull of the black, foul stuff. What little time they took from planting to inspect its progress showed the lichen to be uniformly viable.

THE first night after they had decided to consider their planting completed, Pinky stepped outside the gel to rid himself of the silent, bitterly resentful company of the others. Berius had set some hours before. High tide had come and gone. The air eddied fitfully. Seven suns of the Dutch Cluster were grouped near the horizon, brilliant and baleful in the deep blue sky. Pinky regarded them for many thoughtful minutes. He called Hoek to come outside.

The sweat-wrinkled Dutchman was out in a moment, still adjusting his night helmet of clear silicone to his respirator.

"Look at the Cluster," Pinky directed him.

Hoek studied the stars woodenly. "Well," he said. "Is this all? I've lived in the Cluster all my life. It's nothing to me."

"You don't notice anything?" Pinky insisted.

"Nothing special," Hoek admitted.

"The sky is blue," Pinky persisted.

Hoek shrugged. "Skies are like that," he said acidly.

"Not this one, damn it," Pinky insisted. "This one is *violet*, remember. Not blue. No water vapor!"

The moment Hoek had the idea he leaped to its implications with the speed of thought. "You're mad," he gasped. "No, it couldn't be! That would take years!"

"I thought so, too," Pinky agreed. "And I hate to think how many uncounted trillions of tons of water."

"We'd better tell Bayuk," Hoek said tensely, scuttling for the lock.

"So the sky is blue," Bayuk said with his irritating unconcern for anything Pinky said. "I like blue. I don't care. Blue, violet. What of it?"

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"Tell him," Hoek shrilled excitedly, seizing his slide rule from the desk.

"It takes water vapor to make the sky blue," Pinky explained. "And a hell of a lot more than we can believe the lichens have made." Silence greeted his announcement, while they watched Hoek move the slide and jot figures on a pad. He looked up.

"In theory there has been enough solar energy absorbed," he said pensively. "But . . . " The slide moved again. "I thought so. There was not that much water of crystallization in the rock that has been eroded so far.

"Where did it come from, then?" Bayuk demanded irritably.

Hoek was jerking his helmet over his head. "There is still some stock in the greenhouse," he told them nervously. "This thing frightens me!"

Pinky and the Terrestrial exchanged disquietingly veiled glances as the unkempt botanist twitched his way through the air-lock.

His pocked and pitted features were drawn and pale when he came back. He stacked his respirator with lips still tightly drawn. Steadying himself against the drying rack, he swung to face them.

"Well?" Bayuk growled from his chair.

"The solution tears the sandstone completely to pieces," he said tensely.

"What solution?"

"The water from the lichens," Hoek told him, his voice choked and bitter. *"Billions!* I would have made billions!" He cursed in vicious space Dutch.

"I drained off some of the solution," he told Pinky, apparently realizing that the engineer would understand him better. "I put some sandstone chips in it and heated it. The rock broke down—completely!"

"What do you mean, completely?" Pinky demanded, half-fearful he knew the answer.

"The sludge in the beaker," Hoek said, almost sobbing. "The solution pulled out the water of crystallization, yes, but that was not enough! It is so water-hungry that it yanked oxygen and hydrogen from the compound and made still more water!"

"I don't understand that," Bayuk protested.

"It will do the same to anything," Hoek expanded. "Put bauxite in it, and it would strip off the hydroxyl to make more water! Anything! Any mineral with hydrogen and oxygen in its compound will break down!"

"So what?" Bayuk growled, getting the point. "If some water's good, more is better."

"Not this much more," Pinky declared grimly. "It will make huge seas of it. Castor will drag them around in mile-high tides, sweeping everything before them. The hills and pressure ridges will be broken down by the solution. This will be

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a watery planet, one huge, wildly tidal sea!"

The vision of it struck Bayuk deeply. "How soon will this happen?" he gasped. "We must call for a ship at once!"

"Oh, we're not trapped," Pinky said, disgusted with the other's fear. "*It will take a year or so.*"

Bayuk's pallid owls slowly regained their color. "A year?" he whispered. "A year?" He brightened suddenly. A triumphant grin split his fat face.

"You morons!" he crowed, hurling his cigar from him. "This won't make a bit of difference! Hoek! Wake up, you fool! We can pull out yet!" He turned quickly to Pinky. "Give me that tube," he demanded, lurching to his feet.

"Why?"

"We've got to get news to Castor that the lichen is growing! Have you ever heard of a gold rush? Ships will swarm here like flies, everybody trying to buy a claim from us!"

HOEK was instantly resuscitated. "Saints!" he shrieked. "Yes. Quick, Pinky! The tube!"

"Don't be silly," Pinky said stubbornly. "No one would have time to develop a claim before there was too much water, and you could never kill off the lichen—it's too widespread!"

"Don't be a fool!" Bayuk stormed. "You've got a chance to make a billion-credit killing in a couple days. Lightning never strikes twice! Give me that tube!" He sprang toward the redhead.

His paunchiness was betraying, Pinky found in the first instant of physical encounter. Months of gruelling labor on Pollux had hardened Bayuk. They were struggling on the gel in an instant. He felt rather than saw Hoek join the fray. It was a wild scramble for a few brief instants, with no weapons more lethal than fists and knees. Pinky tore himself free momentarily. Before either of the others could stop him, he had wrenched the driver tube from his jumper. Still half on his back, with one arm in Hoek's chancery, he hurled the tiny lump of metal and quartz at the sink with all his force. It rang shatteringly, the sound of its sundered filaments plain. Pinky relaxed in their grip.

"Go on," he taunted them, flat on his back. "*Now* let me see you call Castor!"

The pointlessness of the struggle stopped it. Pinky sat up. "And no spare!" he told them.

Bayuk was squatting on his haunches, his knees on the gel. He could not seem to tear his eyes from the battered wreck of the tube. "You've *marooned* us!" he gasped.

"No," Pinky said, getting to his feet. "I can get you home, but on my terms."

Hoek squalled like an injured animal. "He wants it all for himself!" he screamed.

Bayuk's broad features darkened

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with hate. "So!" he hissed. "You pious blackmailer! And imagine, I felt a little bad about taking your money! It takes an old fool to be fool enough!" he concluded bitterly.

Pinky felt his senses swim. "You take *my* money?" he gasped.

"Oh, don't overplay it," Hoek snarled. "I warned you, Bayuk," he told the other shrilly. "We should never have trusted him! I told you to slug him back on Castor! We never should have come here!"

"Partners, eh?" Pinky said bitterly. "No wonder you're so willing to sell claims to the suckers!" He retreated within himself.

"Now, wait," Bayuk said, suddenly all smiles again. "We can't get anywhere this way. You can't leave here yourself without letting us get away, too. I say, Pinky, there's plenty for all of us. We can make a deal. There's no point to your being a pig about this."

Pinky laughed bitterly. "I suppose you crooks couldn't imagine any other motive," he told them. "I don't want any part of it. It's fraud. I won't touch it."

Bayuk was stunned. "You'd turn your back on a fortune?" he gasped.

"Yes, if I had to get it that way," Pinky declared.

"Well, what about us?" Hoek demanded. "We're not such fools!"

Bayuk had still not gotten over the shock of it. "You mean you really thought this was on the level?" he demanded.

"Yes."

The bald Terrestrial roared with laughter. "You are a sucker!" he gasped. "How you fell for that radiogram!" The engineer cursed himself bitterly. Now he could see it. Now he could recall that he had never seen Hoek's money. And it was *Bayuk* who had declared what *his* roll had been worth. Of course, it had all been a scheme to get his forty thousand credits. The expedition hadn't cost a tenth of that!

"You guys certainly fixed me," Pinky said sadly. "Wait till my old man hears about it." He looked at them, his pink face young and guileless. "After all, the Company did owe me my pay!"

"That's right!" Bayuk said earnestly, scenting a chance to salvage something for himself.

"I'll tell you what," said Pinky. "Pay me now for what I put into your little fraud and the ten thousand the Company owes me, and you can have my stock. I don't give a damn what you do with it."

Bayuk frowned. "You mean *now* —literally—today?"

"That's what I mean."

"Well, we can't. It isn't here. We don't have any real money with us."

"It's stashed in my place," Hoek told him.

"And we'll have to sell some stock," Bayuk pointed out. "But the minute we're back on Castor . . . "

"I'll bet," Pinky interrupted

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bitterly. "All I ever got from you guys on Castor was a rooking. No thanks. Pay me now. In cash."

Bayuk shrugged hopelessly. "Then it's no deal," he protested.

"I've got to get *something* out of this," Pinky said angrily. "All right, then," he exclaimed with more gusto. "Sell me the lichen process! Let me take that back! Some other planet, under control . . ."

"Don't be a fool, Meinheer," Hoek told him stiffly. "How many places are there in the Galaxy where it's important to have water? Only the unusual coincidence of a dry planet that had water in its rocks, right in the middle of a lot of other planets poor in minerals makes this place of any value."

"I still want it," Pinky said. "I can't take anything else without being an accessory to your fraud. Sell it to me for my stock!"

Bayuk looked at Hoek. "Why not?" he asked.

He drafted the papers, and Pinky edited them carefully before they wrote duplicate final copies.

"And now, Mr. Lane," Bayuk said heavily. "How will you get us home? How will you signal the spaceship to come and get us?"

"Won't have to," Pinky grinned. "They'll be here in droves any day."

"They?"

"Sure. Anything that flies. Can't you imagine how Pollux looks from Castor right now? With more than a fifth of the surface covered with that black growth? Somebody'll catch on pretty quick. They'll be thick as flies."

IN little more than a week Pinky sat across the table from Freddy in the Holland House Casino, killing the last hours until his ship left for Berius IV. He had wound up his affairs in the Dutch Cluster. Bart had been paid for his advance from the funds that finally arrived on Three. Pinky had registered his purchase of the lichen process and had valid title to it. Nothing more remained than to break the news to his father.

The screaming swirl of water-filled air to the east, as the tide ran swiftly toward its flood, bulged and sagged the silica gel walls. The floor rippled and fluttered in unbroken tremors heralding the approaching crest of the land tide.

Freddy beat him with twenty, the sound of the card on the baize soft in the quiet Casino. Pinky bet another guilder. He heard the sound and turned to see that Bart had taken the stool next to him.

"Deal me in, Freddy," the gambler said softly, lifting a stack of chips from the rack.

"Hello, Mr. Bartalucia," Pinky said unenthusiastically.

"Going home, kid?" Bart asked, rapping a knuckle on the baize for a hit.

"Nothing to hang around here for," Pinky confessed.

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"They took you, did they?" Bart asked acidly, turning up twenty-one. Freddy went bust trying to match it. He paid them both.

"You could call it that," Pinky said, barely audibly. "They got my stock, if that's what you mean."

"That's what your old man will call it," Bart reminded him.

"Probably."

"So it cost you fifty thousand to find out that they had conned you for fair?"

"Uh huh."

"You must be an awful sap, Pinky, that's the truth," Bart growled huskily. "I hear those two crooks fell into something good up there, and are cleaning up."

"So they say," Pinky admitted, thinking earnestly about how Bart knew Bayuk had been the brains of the swindle.

"And with all that dough floating around, you couldn't find a way to make a little stick to you?" Bart insisted.

Freddy dealt again. Pinky had fourteen. "Hit me," he said tonelessly. Freddy's eyes flickered to Bart's for an instant. Somehow Pinky felt that a signal had passed between them. Freddy gave him a seven.

"Twenty-one," Pinky said. "I couldn't find any way to get rich dealing with those birds," he admitted, in answer to Bart's question. "I just can't see getting in a league with people you know are crooked, Mr. Bartalucia."

"What the hell," the gambler protested, as Freddy dealt again. "You were partners with them two weeks ago."

"Mr. Bayuk sort of took me since then," Pinky pointed out. He turned up the ace and queen of spades. "Black Jack," he said. Freddy paid him one and a half for one.

"You're lucky tonight," Bart told him. "Don't pinch down. Let it ride." Pinky restrained his finger.

"Okay," he said. He caught another black jack. Bart lost.

After his seventh straight win, Pinky felt his face redden. Freddy was dealing from the bottom, only with a difference. He made Pinky win every time. When the dealer took his stack of one-guilder chips and gave him hundreds instead, Pinky knew he had a pile.

"Very lucky tonight," Bart said with the soft insouciance of the professional gambler. "Sometimes a guy can't lose."

"Like you, eh, Bart?" Pinky asked.

"You're taking my shirt," Bart told him without emotion, as Pinky won another hand. He let the stack ride. He knew there were sixty thousand guilders in it. One more win and he'd have recouped all that he had lost on Castor and Pollux.

Freddy dealt again. "No," Pinky said. "That's not what I meant. I mean about things on Castor. And Pollux. I guess you figure to skim

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a little off the top of what Hoek and Bayuk are making, eh?"

Bart smiled slightly. "Some," he admitted. "Although you are draining away what I might call a fair share of it right now."

Pinky looked at his cards. He had the ace and queen of clubs. Black jack again. He raised his blue eyes to Freddy. "Hit me," he said.

The dealer started in spite of his professional composure. Pinky turned to look at Bart, smiling slightly. Without looking at the card Freddy dealt him he said, "That breaks me," and turned them all face down. Freddy slowly drew the chips to himself.

Bart frowned. "I've seen everything," he said.

"I don't want a piece of that outfit, no matter how I get it," Pinky said. "Anyway, Mr. Bartalucia, you don't have to worry about me. I'll make out all right. I'm really only worried about you. Something tells me this is one time you don't cut in on somebody's grift."

Bart's laugh rustled in his throat. "Forget it, kid. I *always* make out."

Pinky shook his head doubtfully.

"Bayuk's laundry marks were Dutch," Bart said. "Barney turned that up. Terrestrial! Why that shifty grifter has a record in the Cluster as long as your arm!"

"I'm glad you said it for me, Mr. Bartalucia," Pinky grinned. "No, I guess you'll make out." He picked his slicker off an unoccupied stool. "Time for my ship," he said. "It's been a real experience."

Bart eyed him thoughtfully. "I hope I'm not underestimating you, kid," he said. "When I see a guy hit twenty-one, it makes me think. Maybe you should stick around a while, too."

"You mean like Hoek and Bayuk?" Pinky asked.

"They're not going anywhere until I get mine," Bart confessed.

Pinky laughed. "If you figure you can buy any drinks with ten percent of what I got," he told the gambler, "It'll be a long dry summer."

"Okay, Pinky," Bart grinned. "Better luck another time."

PINKY did not begin to relax until the Interstellar ship blasted away from Berius IV toward Centaurus. He had not been sure how far Bart's arm reached in the Cluster. Bayuk and Hoek were trapped, he knew. Bart would not let them out of his sight until the lichen had proven itself. That would be long enough for the swindlers' intended victims to discover Pollux's eventual fate and get their money back.

He decided that he was the only winner in the game of double-cross. Fondly he removed the official registry document from his pocket. The lichen process was absolutely, incontestably his!

"Fifty thousand credits," he

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mused. "What a price!" He grinned at the recollection of what Hoek had said about the solution of lichen acid.

"Put bauxite in it, and it would strip off the hydroxyl to make more water!"

He could see it now. A big steel tank. Load it with crushed bauxite. Cover it with the solution. Heat. Drain off the liquor when the reaction had ended. Save what was left.

What was left? Oh, yes. Metallic aluminum. Freed from its hydroxyl radical by the formation of water, the virgin metal would be produced at a third the cost of the electrolytic process. He had the unmistakable feeling one of the great fortunes of the Galaxy was about to be founded.

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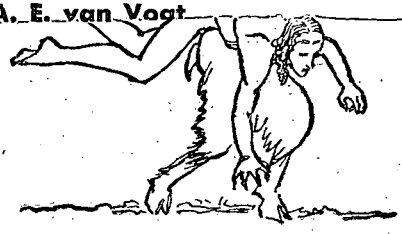
steak, you—thick, rare, and with onions!"

* * *



AFTER I had my chicken broth, we went into the parlor. Helen resumed her knitting of a pair of baby socks, while I tried in vain

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was teetering on the brink of impatience.

"He stuck his tongue out at me, the dirty dog," I said, composed but indignant. I shouted at the wall, "Come out and fight like a man."

"Maybe the pillars aren't the only things that are cracked," Helen observed slyly. "What's that you're reading?"

"*Gory Horror Stories*," I told her. "I wanted something to relax with, and Lana Turner wasn't handy."

"A shame," she sympathized, "an out and out shame. What you need, me boy, is a good night's rest to get these hallucinations out of your mind."

"You're probably right," I admitted, yawning to convince myself. "Guess I'll hit the hay."

Helen went up the stairs ahead of me. I paused, looking back into the parlor. By the light from the hallway, I saw what looked like a pointed nose crawling around one of the pillars. I threw the magazine at it and bolted up the stairs.

Helen looked at me oddly.

"Exercise," I rationalized, laughing lightly and springing into the air several times.

She raised her eyes to heaven and retreated into the bedroom.

* * *

IT was about three in the morning when I felt a sharp tug at my shoulder and heard Helen's voice calling my name.

"Wake up," she said, shaking me, "wake up. I hear somebody downstairs."

"Probably only burglars," I said, rolling over again.

There was a brief silence.

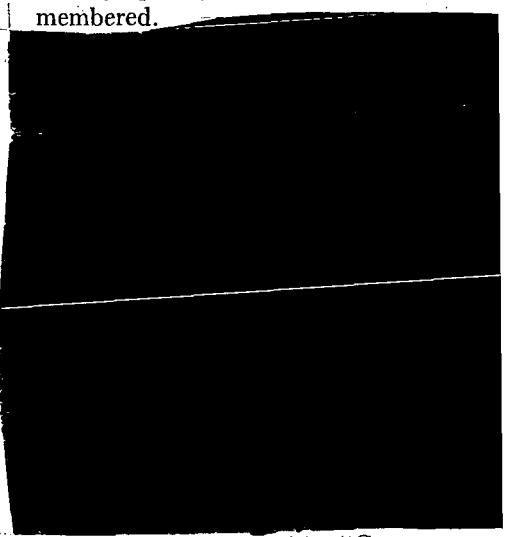
I sat up, looked at her.

Her pretty face was hard, cruel, stony.

"Nag!" I accused, searching the chilly floor for my slippers. "I'll tell him to be quieter."

I put on my bathrobe and went down the stairs, yawning loudly.

It was then that I heard the music — soft, low, haunting, then suddenly high and shrill, with a melody quickly forgotten, easily remembered.



"Hey, you," I said. "Get your hoofs off my wife's clean couch!"

He stopped playing and looked up in annoyance. Then he turned his head and began playing again.

I stepped up to him. "Don't mind me," I said, "I only own the joint."

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He nodded affably, without breaking off the music.

"Will you cut out that racket and say something?"

With an injured look, he removed the pipes from his lips, and in a thin, reedy voice, inquired, "Like what?"

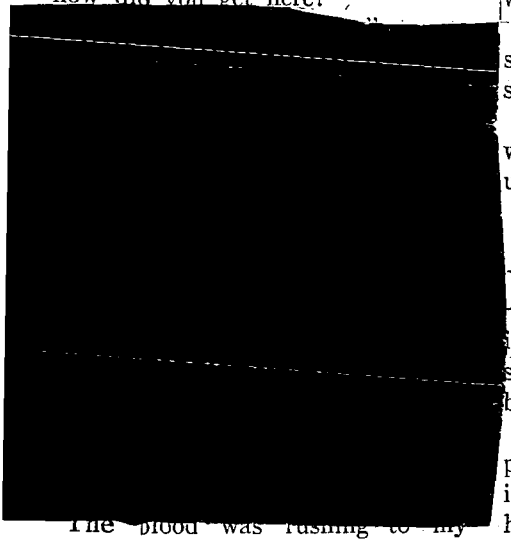
"Anything," I said.

He shrugged. "Anything," he repeated, and raised the instrument.

"Don't start that again," I said quickly. "What are you doing here?"

"Playing my pipes, of course."

"I mean," I said exasperatedly, "how did you get here?"



The blood was rushing to my face. "Now look, chum—"

He laughed and jumped nimbly to his hoofs. "Guess I'll see if I can dig up a few nymphs," he said, and walked into the wallpaper between two of the pillars.

"Hey," I yelled, "gimme back my watch!"

He turned around from the inside of the wall and flattened his pointed nose against the edge.

"Try and get it," he leered.

I swung at him, and my fist crashed resoundingly against the wall. He leaped away, laughing, and skipped off into the distance, dancing and playing his pipes.

I looked down at my hand. It was swollen and throbbing.

Helen stood in the doorway. "Well," she said. Her foot was tapping on the floor.

"I—uh—ran into a wall," I said weakly.

She closed her eyes for a few seconds, then opened them and smiled condescendingly.

"If you're through playing, may we get some sleep?" She disappeared up the stairs.

Meekly, I followed her.

* * *

IT didn't sound any more logical over a cup of coffee the next morning. Helen was sweet and kind, and she agreed with everything I said, but I knew she didn't believe me.

"All right," I said firmly, "I'll prove it to you. I'll just sit there in the parlor this afternoon and nab him when he comes out. Then we'll see who's dreaming things."

With my copy of *Gory Horror Stories* tucked securely under my arm, I marched resolutely into the parlor and then sat reading, waiting.

Hours passed and nothing hap-

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pened. Where was he anyway? I wanted to show Helen it wasn't just in my mind. Besides I had a score to settle with him—my hand still hurt. Probably chasing nymphs, I decided. Now what the devil was a nymph? Probably a girl since he didn't seem to be the bug collector type. That crack he made about Helen being some chick. It was true, of course, but I didn't like the look in the fellow's eyes when he said it.

I must have dozed, for suddenly I became aware of voices coming from the kitchen—Helen's and another's.

"What an odd story, Mr. Pan," Helen was saying.

"You can call me Pansy, honey," a thin, reedy, glucose-coated voice said.

In three steps I was at the door The character with the hoofs was sitting at the kitchen table, a cup of coffee in front of him. He had Helen's hands in his, and she was blushing slightly.

"Hey!" I said.

Pan let go of her hands and looked annoyed at the interruption.

"Darling," Helen cooed, jumping up. "Mr. Pan—Pansy—Mr. Pan, I mean, has been telling me the oddest story."

"I'll just bet he has," I said, glaring at the man.

He looked bored and when Helen couldn't see he stuck out his tongue at me.

"What's he doing in my best suit!" I said, noticing suddenly that he was fully dressed this time. The suit was too large for him, but he had rolled up the pant's legs to make them fit. I turned on him. "Look, you—"

"For Pete's sake," Helen interrupted, "he couldn't go around in those woolen breeches. Why—why he might've gotten pneumonia."

She smiled sweetly at him, and he returned a grateful look. It was easy to see I was the villain here. I sank into a chair.

"Anyway," I said, trying to console myself, "now you believe me."

"Yes," she said, "but I think it was positively shameful the way you tried to hit him last night. I'm glad you got hurt; it serves you right." She cast him a sympathetic glance.

"This," I said, "is ridiculous."

"Oh, you," she pouted, "you're as bad as Zeus!"

"Zeus?"

"The god who banished poor Pan into that design on the wallpaper, and just because Pan gave him a hotfoot with one of Zeus' own thunderbolts."

I shook my head in mock sadness. "Gee," I said, "you poor misunderstood boy," and he stuck out his tongue again.

I was mad. This—this jerk was wearing my best suit of clothes, he'd swiped my watch, and now he was turning my wife against me. I was in no mood to calmly view a tongue wagging at me, so I picked

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up a flatiron and started after him.

He got a frightened look on his face and ran through the dining room into the parlor. He was a yard from the wallpaper when I decided to swing. He stopped and ducked, and I sailed over his head.

"Oh, oh," I thought, "here I go again."

I closed my eyes, waiting for the wall to stop me, but instead of hitting the wall, I went through it. Below me was grass and hard ground. A country field stretched in all directions, and there was a forest in the distance. Overhead a few clouds drifted in a vast blue sky.

I looked over my shoulder and saw Pan standing in my parlor grinning at me. Helen was beside him. She turned her cold eyes from me.

"Pan—since my husband is too busy being a hot tempered ruffian —will you take me out this evening?"

"Hey, wait," I yelled, getting up, "you can't —" I bumped into the invisible wall. Now, my nose ached.

"Delighted," Pan said, bowing low gallantly.

* * *

HELEN spent the remainder of the afternoon making over my suit, while Pan sat in the parlor smoking my cigars and enjoying my discomfort. I wasn't happy.

Hours later, she finished, and Pan tried it on. It fit—Helen was a good seamstress—but the suit would never be the same.

"If you two are going nightclubbing," I said, "how about leaving me some food. I'm starving."

"Always thinking of your stomach!" Helen said disgustedly.

Pan, needless to say, was for letting me starve, but Helen relented and made a sandwich which she tossed through the wall to me.

When they were ready to leave, Helen went to get her coat, and Pan of course wore mine. I also noticed he had somehow managed to shove his hoofs into my best pair of shoes. I sat down on the grass and watched them leave. Pan grinned and waved goodbye to me with his tongue.

I was too sore and bewildered to return the gesture. My wife was going out with a strange man, and there I was stuck on a piece of wallpaper. A strange man? It wouldn't have been so bad if it were only a man. Pan was half goat. Maybe I should see if I could get a couple of nymphs, I thought. I decided against it as I wouldn't even know what to look for.

I wondered if I were really in ancient Greece, but I didn't want to get lost trying to find out. Things were bad enough without that. I walked around the cracked pillars which somehow supported a marble roof and it reminded me of pictures I'd seen of the Parthenon — except my parlor was in it.

With nothing else to do, I sat on the grass, nibbling my sandwich, and waited for the return of my wandering wife and her new boy

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friend.

It was late when they came in. I didn't know what time it was, because Pan still had my watch. I could see them by the moonlight that came in through the window.

Pan was saying, "Aw, come on, let's elope."

"Now, Pan," Helen said demurely, "you know I've got a husband."

"I can take care of that," Pan said confidently.

"No, Pan, I've gotten used to him. By the way, I think you'd better sleep in the forest tonight. You got hoofprints all over the couch."

Pan grinned slyly. "I have a better idea," he said. "Suppose we let junior sleep in the forest to teach him a lesson, while I —"

"Pan!" Her voice sounded shocked. She switched on the light and turned to look at me. "Oh, you still here?"

I smiled cheerfully and waved a greeting. "Hello. Have a nice time?"

"Ducky," she said.

"How about letting me out of here now," I said.

"Nuts!" Pan said. "For all I care —"

"You'd better let him out, Pan," Helen said.

Pan shrugged. "Okay," he said. "You can come out now."

"Thanks."

I stepped into the parlor and swung at him, and he ducked under it and leaped into the wallpaper. His grin didn't seem as full as it used to be; there was a grim determination about it.

"I'll see you later," he promised, and disappeared behind a pillar.

Silently, I followed Helen to the bedroom.

"Helen," I said, when we were upstairs, "this is silly. The way you're playing up to this — this character."

Her eyes sparkled mischievously. "Why I do believe you're jealous," she exclaimed delightedly.

"That's not it at all—well, not completely, anyway. What I mean is, Pan fancies himself quite the ladykiller, and he isn't going to be content with just fooling around like this. Did you see that look he gave you tonight?"

"Well," she said, looking highly pleased, "you really are jealous, aren't you?"

"Helen, be serious, will you? Pan's a dangerous character. He's not the sweet, innocent little boy you seem to think."

"I suppose he is a little — unearthly," she admitted, "but he's perfectly harmless. Besides, we can always do something tomorrow. Right now, I'm sleepy."

I wanted to go down right then and do something, but I didn't know what. I supposed Pan would be harmless enough until morning.

* * *

SEVERAL hours later I heard a scream. I sat up quickly, switching on the light. Helen was gone. There was another scream.

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This one seemed farther away. I leaped out of bed and ran downstairs to the parlor. I turned on the lights.

On the wallpaper in the background I saw Pan running away with Helen's squirming figure clutched tightly in his arms. And the wall was solid again.

They looked like two little bugs scampering up the wall, getting smaller as they approached the forest. I put my finger on the wallpaper in front of them, but of course they went right under it.

I was frantic. Pan was rapidly approaching the forest. Once he was in there, I could never get him, and Helen would be lost forever.

Desperately, I clawed at the wall, tearing the paper with my fingernails. Just as Pan was about to rush into the forest, I ripped it from the wallpaper, leaving only a blank space. Pan halted, bewildered, Then he turned and ran in another direction. Elated, I tore out another section in front of him, blocking his path. He turned to face me, looking more confused than angry. Helen was still in his arms.

"You're trapped, Pan," I yelled at him. "Better give up. I can rip you out just as easily as I did those woods."

I pulled down strips on either side of him, leaving only a narrow pathway leading back to the parlor. Pan was licked and he knew it. He shrugged resignedly and came back. Their figures became larger as they approached, and in a matter of minutes Pan and Helen were in the parlor. Helen was white from her experience. Pan hung his head and fidgeted, wondering what came next.

I made him hand over my watch and take off my clothes.

"I'm going to give you a break, Pan," I told him. "I'll hold this piece of forest here in its place on the wall and give you just thirty seconds to get to it. Now, beat it!"

Pan's eyes lit up, and as he turned I gave a kick that sent him tumbling through the wall. He scrambled up quickly and ran across the fields into the forest. I took the painted trees and crumpled the paper into a ball.

"I'll burn this in the furnace," I said. "Pan won't die, because he'll still be in that world of his. This wallpaper is just the door between his world and ours, and it'll be that we're destroying."

Then Helen was in my arms and I was kissing her.

THE END

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THE LITTLE PEOPLE

By Willy Ley

TAKE a map of the North American continent and look for Hudson Bay. It connects with the Atlantic Ocean to the East by way of Hudson Strait which, on the inland side, ends at a large island: Southampton Island. To the North of Southampton Island you'll find the Foxe Channel, to the East of the Foxe Channel the Foxe Peninsula which is a part of Baffin Island. To the North of Foxe Channel, finally, there is Foxe Basin. As the spelling indicates all these names have nothing to do with an arctic variety of the well-known carnivore, but are derived from the name of a man: Captain Luke Foxe of Hull. He explored this region in 1631-2. Like many another sailor of his time he tried to find the so-called North-West Passage through which, it was hoped, one could sail into the Pacific Ocean across the northern part of North America.

When Captain Luke Foxe published the journal of his voyage (in 1635) the book bore the title:

NORTH-VVEST FOX;
or Fox from the North-West Passage

Much later it was reprinted by the Hakluyt Society as vol. 88/89 of their publications. On page 319 of the second volume of the Hakluyt Society edition you find mention of an island which had just been visited by an exploring party:

The newes from the land was that this Iland was a Sepulchre for that the Salvages had laid their dead (I cannot say interred), for it is all stone, as they cannot dig therein, but lay the Corpes upon the stones, and well them about with the same, coffining them also by laying the sides of old sleddes above, which have been artificially made. The boards are some 9 or 10 ft. long, 4 inches thicke. In what manner the tree they have bin made out of was cloven or sawen, it was so smooth as we could not discerne, the burials had been so old. And, as in other places of those countries, they bury all their Vtensels, as bowes, arrowes, strings, darts, lances, and other implements carved in bone. The longest Corpes was not above 4 foot long, with their heads laid to the West."

The printed book does not say more about this most astonishing find, except for stating that "their Corpes were wrapped in Deare skinnes" and that the sailors left them undisturbed but took the wooden boards for firewood. But a handwritten copy of the original manuscript contains an added sentence, namely: "They seem to be people of small stature, God send me better for my adventures than these."

This, I am sorry to say, is all that is known about the case of the stony graves of "little people" in the western hemisphere. Captain Foxe wrote that "this Iland doth lie in 64 d. 10 m. of latitude," but there is no island in such a location. There are, however, a number of small islands at the southern end of Foxe Channel and any one of them may be meant.

Every nation has its own legends and stories about the "little peo-

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ple." Details vary, but aside from being small they always live either deep in the forest or else in caves in the mountains. The folklore of some nations knows both and has different names for them; German folklore, for example, distinguishes between the gnomes who live *in* the mountains (not *on* the mountains) and the *Ellenmannchen* of the forest. The term is virtually self-translating, all that needs to be added is that only the English "ell" was standardized early as being three feet in length like the yard, elsewhere an ell was usually somewhat longer, around four feet.

How the "little people" got into folklore is by no means certain, but the fact that there exists a long literary tradition about them no doubt helped. Anybody who asked the learned men of his time about the gnomes and the ell-men did receive confirmation of some kind. Both Aristotle and Pliny had mentioned them in their writings. And that literary tradition, which backed folklore, was in turn, backed by fact. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that the literary tradition was based on hearsay, but we now know that this hearsay was substantially correct as far as the principal fact was concerned.

The literary tradition began as far back as possible, namely with Homer's *Iliad* which acquired its final shape in about 600 B.C. The hexameters of lines 3-7 of the third book of the *Iliad* read:

Like to the unending screeching of cranes which fly overhead then
When, having fled from the unceasing rains and the cold of the winter,
Screaming they fly down the path to Okeanos far-flowing waters
Threatening death and destruction to races of small-bodied pygmies
Swooping on down from the high dusky air to do terrible combat . . .

Egyptian or Cretan sailors must have told that somewhere, far to the South and almost at the rim of the world, there lived "small-bodied pygmies." To those who might be distrustful of a poet's assertion the Natural History of Aristotle served nicely:

"The cranes fly from the Scythian plains (meaning Russia) to the swamps situated beyond Upper Egypt, whence the Nile comes. These areas are inhabited by pygmies. This is no myth, there actually exists a small tribe, and even their horses are small, their habits are said to be those of Troglodites (cave dwellers)."

Homer was not known directly later in Europe, but they did know Aristotle and also Pliny who had copied that paragraph from Aristotle. An amusing side-thought cropped up later in the writings of Albert von Bollstadt (Albertus Magnus) in the thirteenth century who, after quoting Aristotle, adds that the pygmies stand one ell tall, that they have children when they are three years old and that they die in their eighth year. After stating this he suddenly pauses to ask: *utrum pygmaei sint homines?* — "whether the pygmies are people?" His answer is a loud "no." They can speak and presumably think, but they merely live together without forming a community, they have no art nor philosophy, no moral code and no decency. Although they can make things they are not people. Since Albertus cannot possibly have known such detail (and since, moreover, his assertions are wrong on virtually every count) all this must be the result of "reasoning," possibly with some confusion between rumors about pygmies and stories

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about monkeys.

IT took a long time until these stories gained a little substance. During the latter half of the eighteenth century rumors began to emanate from Portuguese ports. Portuguese sailors, returning from Africa, swore that they had been told by reliable natives about "little men" in the forests, "hairy men" in the forests, and "big hairy men" in the mountains. But all this remained rumor for another century. The man who clarified most of it was Paul Belloni du Chaillu, a Frenchman born on July 31st, 1835, probably in Paris. He came to the United States at the age of twenty and because he already had some African experience the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia sent him on an expedition to equatorial West Africa.

On the expedition du Chaillu discovered the gorilla, ending once and for all the confusion which had existed about it. That confusion had been due to the fact that the gorilla (of course the "big hairy man" of the mountains) had been thought mythical. The chimpansee had been known, but had been called gorilla. It is easy to see why reports and what was thought to be fact did not agree no matter how hard people in Europe and in North America tried to make them tally.

Naturally an explorer who had been so successful was sent on another expedition at once, he described that second expedition later in a book called *Journey to Ashango-land*. On that expedition, made during the years 1863-5 du Chaillu encountered pygmies. They did exist, after all. Their tribes, they told through a native interpreter, was that of the Obongo. But du Chaillu said that they "probably were not real negroes." Their skin was not black nor dark brown, but a pale yellow-brown "like imperfectly roasted coffee beans." They did not have much beard and little hair on their heads. But they had "a great growth of body hair," especially when comtrasted with the neighboring negro tribes which had virtually none, much less even than a relatively hairless white man. Of course du Chaillu measured his Obongo; the average height of the males was 4 ft. 7 in., the females, some 6 inches shorter.

That settled the question of whether pygmies existed at all; it did not yet clear up the problem of the pygmies in Homer and in Aristotle. *They* were supposed to live in or beyond the Nile swamps, somewhere near the Mountains of the Moon, and not in West Africa. Geographers had already settled the problem of the Mountains of the Moon by the time du Chaillu made his voyages. There were tall mountains in equatorial Africa, what the ancients had probably meant is now known as the Ruwenzori range. A linguist had even found the reason for this intriguing and ancient name "Mountains of the Moon." In Arabic this is *Jibal el-qamar*, but what the Arabs had said and written originally was *Jibal qomr*, meaning "blueish (distant?) mountains."

But these pygmies were found too, by a man who was about a year younger than du Chaillu. He was Dr. Georg August Schweinfurth, who had been born in Riga on December 29, 1836. Schweinfurth was a gifted artist and an ardent student of plant life. On his trip of exploration he followed a route which could be expected to lead him to the sources of the Nile. He penetrated the territory of the Niam-niam, discovered the Welle River and estab-

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lished that it was not a tributary of the Nile, and, in 1870, saw his first pygmy. He was Adimoko of the tribe of the Akka, a fairly old man and rather tall, 4 ft. 10 inches. Schweinfurth had read du Chaillu's book and knew about the Obongo. His Akka seemed to be of about the same size, with the same skin color. But they did not have more body hair than their tall neighbors. Their physical proportions differed from other people in only a few respects. They were short-legged and large-footed, with a pronounced tendency to a "pendulous abdomen." Their most conspicuous feature, apart from their small size, were the large shell-like ears. Schweinfurth stressed this point as indicative of a racial difference, "for all negroes have beautiful ears." Adimoko, when questioned with the help of an interpreter, rattled off the names of seven other pygmy tribes. Schweinfurth's notes and sketches were largely destroyed when his camp caught fire, but he remembered having measured a male Akka only 4 ft. 4 in. tall and a female Akka 4 ft. 1 inch.

That Aristotle actually meant the Akka and related tribes (in spite of his two mistakes: they are not cave dwellers and they don't have horses, neither small nor large) is indicated by the find of such pygmies on pictures on tombs from the Fifth Dynasty of Egypt, about 2500 B.C. It is confirmed by direct information from the Sixth Dynasty: Pharaoh Phiops II sent a trusted man named Harkhuf to the South to bring him a pygmy as slave.

HARD on the heels of Schweinfurth's discovery came information about pygmy tribes in Asia: the forest pygmies of the Malayan peninsula, the natives of the Andaman islands, the Aetas of the Philippine Islands and others. Anthropologists now call all the African pygmy tribes *Negrillos*, while the Asiatic tribes are called *Negritos*. And with the obvious exception of a few island dwelling tribes it can be said that all of them live in undesirable surroundings. It looks as if their taller and stronger neighbors had pushed them into areas which they did not want for themselves.

As soon as there was enough information to realize this fact a few anthropologists began to phrase a question which sounded as if somebody had paraphrased Albertus Magnus. It was no longer "whether the pygmies are people?" but, instead, "whether the pygmies are the original people?" Did they, by any chance, represent an earlier human stock, now scattered and pushed into odd corners, surviving in small and generally brow-beaten left-overs? Scientists toying with this idea remembered that the horses of today are much larger than their ancestors. That, in general, most large-sized living mammals had had small ancestors. And then, after all, our own ancestry had to lead somewhere to ape-like beings and, still farther down the evolutionary tree, to common ancestors. These ancestors had probably been small. And even the living apes, though only rather distantly related to us, are all smaller than Man. And the one exception, the gorilla, is only more massive and heavier by far, but not taller.

All this was lovely logic. It suffered only from the one main drawback that it was not supported by fossil evidence of any kind. In saying this I am referring to the period just before the outbreak of the first World War. The number of fossil human remains then known

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was small. But what there was did not indicate any great change in size since the Ice Age. There was the famous Neanderthal race, different from present day man mostly in skull structure. The Neanderthal race (the name is derived from a valley near Dusseldorf in western Germany where the first skull was found in 1856) measured 5 ft. 3 in. or 5 ft. 4 in., big males some two or three inches more. Somewhat small as compared to the larger living human races, but by no means "pygmy." Then there was the so-called Heidelberg jaw, found near the city of Mauer which, in turn, is near Heidelberg. No complete skeleton of this "Heidelberg race" has been found, but two things are certain. One is that they were at least 50,000 years older than the Neanderthal race. The other that they were much taller. The latest estimates says 6 ft. 2 in., others have gone as high as 6 ft. 6 inches.

Then there was *Pithecanthropus* from Java. It was far less known in, say 1914, than it is now, but even then it was clear that *Pithecanthropus* must have been taller than 5 feet. And in addition to these forms which differed from modern Man, there were the more recent Cro-Magnon. Their name is derived from the place of the supposed first discovery, Cro-Magnon at *Les Eyzies*, Department de Dordogne, France. Later it turned out that a Cro-Magnon man had been discovered in a cave in England (Paviland Cave at Bristol Channel) in 1823, but had been taken to be a British lady of the Roman period. And in 1852 a small landslide near the village of Aurignac, France, exposed a cave in which the skeletons of 17 persons were found. The mayor of the town was informed, he visited the cave, regretted the accident which had overtaken a party of indubitably nice people and then called the local Abbe. He gave them a Christian burial of which the victims of accidents are deserving. But they were really Cro-magnon people. The males stood, on the average, 6 ft. 1 in. tall (some taller) the women around 5 ft. 7 inches.

WHAT there was in the line of human fossils certainly did not support the theory that primitive than had been a pygmy. But not all the evidence consisted of bones. One might almost say: on the contrary. Pre-historic man had first indicated his former existence by leaving tools behind, stone tools. The first to guess at the true nature of these artifacts which had been known for a long time, had been an English antiquarian by the name of John Frere. That was in 1797 and nobody paid much attention to him. Then a French archeologist, Jacques Boucher de Crevecoeur de Perthes, some thirty years later, also defended the point of view that these stone artifacts were weapons of primitive Man. He was severely ridiculed for decades, but he happened to be right and he had the good fortune to see his ideas accepted and approved before he died at the age of eighty.

The flint weapons and tools which John Frere and Boucher de Perthes had presented to the scientific world all belonged to the so-called Ice Age, the pleistocene and their original makers finally came to light. But, find by find, some "others" slowly accumulated; tools, not bones. If they had been found in any of the deposits which formed between glaciations there would be little fuss about them. They would be taken as belonging to a very primitive tribe, one which even the gentlemen from the Neander Valley

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would consider far beneath his notice (except as food) and that with justification. Or one might think that they were the first attempts of an apprentice boy, learning the craft. Or that they were discarded pieces, just begun when an interruption took place and not recovered afterward. As these remarks indicate, they show very little workmanship, so little that a layman would hardly think that they were worked on at all. Even the experts are often doubtful and some of the pieces, as some of the experts claim, may have been chipped accidentally by natural causes. Their whole relationship to Man may consist in having been stepped upon once by somebody.

But these pieces are *not* from the pleistocene. They are from deposits of the Tertiary Period, with a minimum age of one million years. They have been called *eoliths* (dawn stones) and will be fought over for many years to come. The point is that some, found by Prof. Rutot of Brussels, are not only old but also small. Professor Rutot sent some of them to a German naturalist, the late Wilhelm Bolsche who, in reply to a question, wrote me that one thing is absolutely certain. *If* the eoliths which he had in his collection actually were tools they would have been made for the hands of small children or pygmies. And he, as well as Rutot, felt sure that the marks they bore were made by clumsy workmanship and were not accidental. Now it is known that some animals use tools. Fresh water fish build little barriers with pebbles so that their eggs are not carried away by the current. Monkeys use stones to crack open nuts or to throw them at another monkey. But they use stones as they find them, they don't use one tool to make another tool, they don't improve their tools. With this thought in mind it was only natural that Bolsche added in his letter that he would rather believe that there lived a small monkey in Belgium during the Miocene (a subdivision of the Tertiary Period) who made improved tools than consider the chipmarks on these eoliths accidental.

Considering the age of these dawn stones that is probably the only explanation, unless either Rutot dated his finds wrongly or the chipmarks *are* accidental in spite of expert opinion. In addition to these doubtful and violently discussed eoliths Belgium produced another very doubtful find. During the last year of the first World War the German Professor Freudenberg found a few pieces of stone near Antwerp which, he believed, had been the imprint of a pre-human foot. Age: about the same as the eoliths, Middle Tertiary. They are five pieces which do not fit together and of which Freudenberg himself called two "doubtful." The other three *may* show the imprint of the big toe, of the ball of the foot and of the little toe. Anybody but the discoverer himself would call the piece supposed to show the imprint of the ball of the foot doubtful too. From the size of the big toe. Professor Freudenberg calculated that its owner stood 35 inches tall,—the calculation must have involved so many assumptions that you don't have to believe it.

BUT now we do have genuine footprints of pre-historic Man. A recent discovery caused quite some stir. The Abbe Cathala had found them in a hitherto overlooked side cave of the Grotto of Aldene in southern France. The age could be determined rather well, btween 15,-

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)00 and 20,000 years. The people who eft these footprints carried torches there are marks on the walls where he torches were rubbed in order o clean them) and staffs.

Much earlier similar footprints had een found, also in France, in 1912. The place of the discovery was a ave called Tuc d'Audoubert, near St. Girons on the estates of the Count le Begouen. In fact the discovery ad been made by the count's teen-ged sons. They found that in one ave pre-historic men had made clay culptures of animals, with a higher legree of artistry than the run of he mill of present day public monuments. The clay had been scooped up in an adjoining cave. There, where the sculptors had stood to gather their raw material, they had eft impressions of their hands and eet. The former usually smeared nd not clear, the latter sharp and lear, covered with a thin veneer of ime.

I know the measurements of one of these footprints, it is 22.5 centimeters long, which is a shade over 8 3/4 inches. Of the new prints in he Grotto of Aldene I have more nformation from Norbert Casteret n Saint Gaudens. The length of he step, he wrote, where it can be established, is 50 centimeters (about 20 inches), the length of the footprints varies from 16 to 25 centimeters, between 7 and 10 inches. The little toe shows signs of reduction to the same extent as that of modern man.

How tall were these people?

Since they are rather modern we can assume that their proportions were the same as ours. Among white men of today there is a well known relationship between foot length and height. In males we find that they are between 6 times and a little more than 6½ times as tall as their footprint is long. In females we find that they are from 6 1/4 to 7 times as tall as their footprint is long, in rare cases the ratio can go up to almost 7½ times. Taking the largest of the Aldene footprints and assuming that it was made by a male, you arrive at a height of 5 ft. 4 inches. The smallest footprint, taken to be female and computed with the top end of the female ratio—in order to make her as tall as possible—results in a woman 4 ft. 4 inches. Actually the print was probably made by a child. The Aldene prints, like those of Tuc d'Audoubert, point to a small race with only a few individuals "towering" above 5 feet. But they are just small, hardly true pygmies.

STORIES of scientific discoveries often take sudden and unexpected turns. In our case emphasis shifted all of a sudden from western Europe to South Africa. Some 80 miles from the famous diamond mines of Kimberley there is the district of Taungs and in the valley of the Harts River in that district the Reverend Neville Jones had collected stone implements indicating continuous human habitation for the last 500,000 years. But they were only implements, not bones, and it was not until 1924 that Prof. Raymond Dart discovered something that was very human in some respects and very much ape in some others. It was the skull of a child, corresponding in development to a human six years old. Prof. Dart called it *Australopithecus* which means, when translated, Southern Ape (*austral* means South) but it unfortunately is apt to make the layman think of Australia ("Southland") which never had any monkeys or apes. Other scientists called the find "Dart's child," partly be-

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cause it was a child, partly because Dart behaved very much the proud father. Only a very few scientists committed themselves; one find was not enough for an opinion.

Then nothing happened for a long time, but the inhabitants of Transvaal were convinced that they had important things waiting for discovery in their province. It is a matter of record that soon after the first World War a Mr. Cooper, who owns a number of caves near Strekfontein, wrote a small guidebook which contained the sentence: "Come to Sterkfontein and find the missing link."

Dr. Robert Broom did just that. In fact he found several so-called "missing links," now catalogued under names like *Paranthropus* and *Plesianthropus*. It would be useless to write about them now because the South Africans are on a spree of discovery which is only beginning. But it is already possible to state definitely, that they, at long last, have found something which may be classified as a pre-historic pygmy. These finds were made at Sterkfontein which is in the general vicinty of Krugersdorp, about 30 miles southwest of Pretoria.

The other and more important place which has not been mentioned so far lies 125 miles northwest of Pretoria. Its name is Makapaansgat and the nearest town is Potgietersrust, both names of people.

Makapaan was a native chieftain who attacked a caravan of Boers. The Boers, led by Potgieter, drove Makapaan and his men into a cave, piled brushwood into the entrance and ignited it. Makapaan and his men were killed, but so was Potgieter after whom Potgieter's-Rust was named. (Like the Germans, the Boers pull words together without apostrophes, hyphens or anything else, which does make for faster reading, once you are used to it.) When Professor Dart came to those caves near Potgiertersrust he saw that the breccia forming the roof of a cave contained bones, charred bones. But that could still be due to ancient bushfires. Professor Dart was always (unjustly) suspected of being rash.

One by one the elements of conclusive proof were assembled. There were layers of ashes from fires, several of them. The entire deposit had been consolidated by calcareous cement, it was that dream of archeologists, a so-called "sealed site." Bones of *Australopithecus* were found. Skulls of an extinct variety of baboons (*Parapapio*) which, incidentally, points to the Pliocene subdivision of the Tertiary Period. But these skulls of Parapapio baboons had been smashed and not from above, as falling rocks could do it, but on their left, as if from a right-handed blow with a weapon. (Specimens just like it then came to light in the Sterkfontein - Krugersdorp area.) The whole picture built up to that of an erect little creature, about four feet tall, weighing between 80 and 100 pounds, knowing fire and wielding weapons, usually right-handed and having a brain volume of 650 cubic centimeters, which is equal to that of the largest gorilla, half that of the average *Homo sapiens* and only about 125 cubic centimeters less than that of the much larger *Pithecanthropus*.

"These carnivorous hunters were therefore familiar with the use of fire and bludgeons and apparently used crude long bones as implements in similar fashion to Sinanthropus. Some of the penetrating puncture wounds which are also found may have been caused by the dagger-like

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horns of antelopes, and it is noteworthy that up to the present ungulate heads retaining their horns intact have never been found in the dumps . . . These intelligent, energetic, erect and delicately-proportioned little people were as competent as any other primitive human group in cavern life made comfortable by the use of fire, in the employment of long bones as lethal weapons, in the cunning and courage of the chase and in internecine strife. They had conquered the most formidable beasts of the field; they were already in the toils of an ever accelerating evolutionary process occasioned by their intellectual struggle with the forces of nature and with their fellows."

(*From the article: The Makapaansgat Proto-Human Australopithecus prometheus, by Raymond A. Dart in Am. Journal of Physical Anthropology, Sept.* 1948).

One expert, Dr. Sollas, regrets that the name of this astonishing early creature became something as clumsy as *Australopithecus prometheus* and says that it should have been *Homunculus*. One can sympathize with both his regret and his suggestion. It would have been a much more fitting name for the pygmy pre-man which was finally found after so many false leads and wrong starts.

There is still a rumor left.

It is the rumor of the *agogwe*. It is African and deals with "the little furry people." It is at present still as tenuous as the rumors about the pygmies were a century ago. It is, in short, hard to pin down. But an English writer, Frank W. Lane, did his best and by way of what seems to have been extensive correspondence with British colonial officials succeeded in finding two witnesses. He printed their letters in his book *Nature Parade* (Revised ed. London 1944.)

The first account, written by Captain W. Hichens runs:

"Some years ago I was sent on an official lion hunt to this area (Ussure and Simbiti forests on the western side of the Wembare plains) and, while waiting in a forest glade for a man-eater, I saw two small, brown, furry creatures come from the dense forest on one side of the glade and disappear into the thickets on the other. They were like little men, about four feet high, walking upright, but clad in russet hair. The native hunter with me gaped in mingled fear and amazement. They were, he said, agogwe, *the little furry men whom one does not see once in a life time. I made desperate efforts to find them, but without avail in that well nigh impenetrable forest. They may have been monkeys, but, if so, they were no ordinary monkeys, nor baboons, nor colobus, nor Sykes, nor any other kind found in Tanganyika. What were they?"*

The other account was written by a Mr. Cuthbert Burgoyne:

"In 1927 I was with my wife coasting Portuguese East Africa in a Japanese cargo boat. We were sufficiently near land to see objects clearly with a glass of twelve magnifications. There was a sloping beach with light bush above, upon which several dozen baboons were hunting for and picking up shellfish or crabs, to judge by their movements. Two pure white baboons were

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among them. These are very rare, but I had heard of them previously. As we watched, two little brown men walked together out of the bush and down amongst the baboons. They were certainly not any known monkey and yet they must have been akin or they would have disturbed the baboons. They were too far away to see in detail, but these small human-like animals were probably between four and five feet tall, quite upright and graceful in figure . . ."

After everything that Prof. Dart has said about his "fossil Proto-Human" which just failed to be called Homunculus, these *agogwe* suddenly seem to look very familiar. And since two reputable men have permitted their names to be put on record as having seen *agogwe* one will just have to accept it as a fact that there is something living in East Africa that looks like a furred small man from a distance. Judging from the long and slow experience with the other pygmies we may hope that somebody will find out one day.

But Captain Foxe's "corpes" are apt to remain a riddle forever.

LETTERS (*Continued from page* 107)

adult standards while I'm very much afraid that Amazing is aimed toward adolescents; please keep up your high standards.

I have been reading stf since 1932 and I believe that you deserve a lot of credit for publishing a grown up magazine that fulfills its primary purpose of educating and entertaining and that you can leave laying around without having someone say 'Doesn't he ever get tired of reading sex magazines?' Well, I've put in my two bits worth, and I'll be interested in seeing what reaction I get from some of the other readers.

T/Sgt AF 39 447 234
Hq 1807th AACS Wing
APO 633, c/o Postmaster
New York, N.Y.

It's good to hear OW praised so highly, but we want to say a word or two in defense of Howard Browne and Amazing. At the Norwescon, Howard announced that his magazine was—as you have pointed out—adolescent. It's deliberately aimed to attract the reader just moving from the comic book stage to the magazine stage, rather than the confirmed stf reader.—Ed.

Marlyn McCann

I have just finished reading my first issue of OW. I considered three stories rather intriguing and one kinda cute—now you know I'm a femme.

The stories I particularly enjoyed were: Courtesy Call—not completely believable but entertaining; Skeleton key—ditto; Glass Woman of Venus—wish I could use a little yarva on my husband. Robot Romance was a light touch of whimsey, but for the rest of the stories, better luck next time.

I am a neofan, which is the same as saying give me space opera with beautiful gals, handsome heroes and horrible bems. I have only been reading stf for a few months. Where have I been all of your lives? Now that I've found you I'll never let you go. Keep up the good work and I'll be a steady customer.

1015 High Street
Ft. Wayne, Indiana

We're always happy to welcome a new reader, especially one of those rare creatures, the femme fan. If you liked Robot Romance, look up The Starting Over (Nov. OW) in which Archie makes his first appearance. We like a good space opera ourselves now and then, so we'll

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probably be running some in the near future.—Ed.

S. J. Byrne

I've been flattered by all the friendly reader comments concerning Colossus, and also by the nice cover you gave me on Colossus III. In fact, such nice treatment has inspired me to throw away a couple of mediocre yarns and determine to write only the very best possible—possible for me, that is.

I wish to correct one statement made to reader Robert Briney when he asked what happened to Janice as a result of her taking the miser's stone; you said that this was unexplained even in the uncut version. Correction please. With the aid of the miser's stone Janice both saves and punishes her father. His ego is imprisoned in the stone and an ancient ego—which has been cured due to millenia of imprisonment in the stone—is released to take over the Count's body. Thus, the Count's body passes telaug inspection, and his ego is doing time in the miser's stone where I am keeping him on ice for future stories.

4228 Hazeltine
Sherman Oaks, Calif.

We stand corrected Mr. Byrne, and want to call our readers' attention to the fact that you have proved that even editors are human—and can make mistakes.—Ed.

Merritt W. Smith

For a number of years I have read off and on in the realm of stf, but as I have often remarked to my friends, one had to plow through story after story before finding a really good one. Since taking up OW several issues ago, I find that we seem to have something new on the landscape. Have you been hoarding all these good stories?

I notice that none of the stories seem to be over 25-30,000 words, while some of them are very short but concise and to the point. I heartily disagree with the readers who are advocating serials. To my mind, nothing is more disagreeable than having to wait three or four installments to complete one story. I did not object to Colossus, inasmuch as each section was complete in itself. I also like the fact that you list the story length on the contents page. This is handy in sandwiching in the proper story in the available reading time.

As for the rating guide that some of your readers wish, it seems unnecessary to me. We all read for enjoyment of the story, and not for a consensus of opinion. Each to his own taste, I say.

I could list my preferences for No. 8, but will say only that I liked them all very much with the exception of Johnny Goodturn, which was too obvious from the first. Think you may get some comments on The Living Lies, being the type of story it is and handling the subject it does. It had an unusual ending for stf, but when you think it over, it's probably natural.

As for Shaver, if he writes about something other than Lemuria, I will be glad to read it. I think anybody who could dream up the fantasy he did, sincerely or not, could certainly do as well on some other subject.

4476 44th St.
San Diego 15, Calif.

When we asked for you readers to decide the Shaver question, we certainly didn't expect the overwhelming response we have received and are still receiving. Letters are still pouring in, and to date the majority seem to be in favor of publishing a list of his pseudonyms and running stories by him "other than Lemuria and the Mystery." Since letters are still arriving, we will hold off publishing the results until the April issue.—Ed.

Daniel McPhail

Have just read in OW that you have recovered from your illness and are back at the old desk. Please accept my belated congratulations on both your recovery and the birth of your son. And congrats to Bea Ma-

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haffey for so ably guiding OW in your absence.

Neat is the word for OW and Imagination. Their format is the best on the market, and the policy of putting good art on the cover is again evident in the Bok painting on No. 8 —grotesque, yet very accurate as described in the story. Malcolm Smith is usually good. His illo for the lead story was fine, but the figure descending the steps in Merchant of Venus ruined an otherwise good cut.

Bubastis of Egupt and The Living Lies were excellent, and Millions In It was a corker. I see a new fantasy character in J. Marty Reed. Your features are tops. ....

May your success and good health continue!

405 Summit
Lawton, Okla.

We agree with you that J. Marty Reed should be called upon for future narratives, and have already questioned author Ashby on the subject. He is investigating the matter and has promised to send word to us as soon as he discovers what situation Marty has been entangled in lately. —Ed.

Bob Silverberg

OW No. 9 came out today, and improvements were such that I'm compelled to write you for the first time in over a year.

AS was the first promag I ever read, and I followed it with some puzzlement as quality sank lower . . . and lower . . . and lower. I watched hopefully for OW to show some improvement over the first few issues.

It ctaggered woefully with the dull Colossus; the Martin Brand story was good, but it was a reprint. There were occasional flashes . . . the Bradbury yarn, one of the vV stories, and Smith's great covers, of course. But I found myself skipping lines, then paragraphs, and once (No. 6) I read the editorial, letters, one short story, and hid the thing in my files.

No. 9 shows some of the true Palmer talents. The new cleaner typeface is an improvement; the paper is better; the binding is tighter, although you really need staples; the art is good, although sadly stereotyped except for Grossman and Fuqua; and the stories are no longer aimed at the ex-Shaverites.

Judging from your Jan. issue, your mag is one of the best on the market . . . although why you need to charge 35c is far above me. Galaxy has the same number of pages and sells for 25c; the same goes for Astounding. Still, I guess there's nothing to prevent fans from sending in subs to OW and getting it for a quarter.

The January cover by Settles is an outstanding example of ART on a promag, and by far the best thing he has done in the fantasy field. To sum it up, it looks like you're finally on the right road with OW.

760 Montgomery St.
Brooklyn 13, N.Y.

Well, Bob, we're glad OW No. 9 rated so highly with you. And to keep you reading the mag, we'll tell you that in the next few issues you'll find illustrations by Grossman, Fuqua (Tillotson), Cartier and a host of others; covers by Bok, McCauley and Smith; stories by Poul Anderson, Fred Brown, Ted Sturgeon, Richard Ashby, Robert Bloch, Ray Palmer, and many more. How does that sound?—Ed.

Joel Markman

Did anyone ever tell you that you have a perfect magazine? No? Well, you don't. It isn't perfect, but it's slightly terrific.

You might ask me why, but I don't know. I don't enjoy fifty percent of the stories, and the illustrations are usually ghastly. But from the first issue I have thoroughly enjoyed every issue. Maybe it's due to the fact that each one seems better than the one before it. You seem to be getting better artists, better authors, and interesting columns and fillers.

And then, of course there is the Bok cover on the No. 8 issue. I hear

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that while your Mng. Ed. was in New York she commissioned him to do a few more covers. Good, keep him on the job.

According to Rap's Egyptology, although I do like Egupt better than Egypt I don't believe that they ever wrote in English; therefore, the original translation would be Aegypt. The Greeks didn't use English spelling either, but I think that is the earliest spelling.

In the story it struck me that Rog or Craig, whichever you want, stuck more to the idea of describing the cover than to writing the story, which wasn't at all necessary as most artists don't do an actual scene in a story when they make up their cover plan. The old law that the cover has to balance itself or else it just don't look good.

The other novelette hadn't much of a point, though it was well written. It seems funny that Beynon had poor Leonie go to all that trouble just to have her knocked off. It would have been more interesting to have them find a way out, or at least a way to make her escape and try again.

The shorts were all good, with Harness, Shirley, Tucker and Tanner taking lead. One of the things wrong with this issue is that you used too much fantasy and not enough stf. So far, William F. Temple is your best author, and I look forward to much more by him. Also, how about a story by Hannes Bok; he has really turned out some terrific ones in the past.

1560 Grand Concourse
Bronx 57, N.Y.

So the magazine seems to get better with each issue? Well, that's just what we want it to do. With each new issue we get letters from you readers blasting us for what you didn't like and blessing us for what you did; we use these as guides for future issues, and hope you find an improvement each time. We're certainly not going to let Bok get away from us, in fact, the April OW cover is by him, and we have another on hand still unscheduled. If he has time for writing between cover paintings, you can be sure that we'll be more than happy to take a look at his work.—Ed.

David G. Smith

I am certainly glad I read the letter section of the Nov. OW before I read the stories; it has given me a chance to get my letter off right away in the hope that my plea may swing the balance in favor of Richard Shaver giving us a list of his pseudonyms. Come on, Ray, talk him into giving out with the info; he is top man in the field in my opinion (oh, well, I expected those groans of horror and disgust from the anti-Shavarians). Give the man a chance. Don't say American fans are so narrow minded that once they have come to the conclusion that they did not like the Shaver Mystery that was all there was to it and Shaver could never write anything good. How about all you Shaver fans, there must be thousands of you supporting me in my request.

Thanks for publishing that grand story Dear Devil. It so happens that I know Eric Frank Russell personally; I usually see him about once a week when he comes into Liverpool. He's a very nice chap.

Your magazine is just about the best in stf today, it licks aSF to a frazzle, but watch out for Galaxy. Like OW, it has that certain something which means good reading. Still, keep on as you have been doing and you'll stay at the top—and that's as high as anyone can go.

5, Holmefield Ave.
Liverpool, 19
Lancs., England

We agree with you that both Russell and his stories are of the best. We have a contest story of his in this issue, and another story that has not been scheduled as yet. As for the Shaver question, we are listing his pseudonyms in the April issue as we stated earlier in this column. —Ed.

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bath Ave, Van Nuys, Calif. had a 168 line fantasy poem for publication in a fan mag; would like to hear from editors . . . Fans Fans in central California (Stockton, Sacramento, etc.) interested in working on a super-fanzine get in touch with Ed Ludwig, 3304 Bonnie Lane, Stockton, Calif. . . . *The San Diego Science Fiction and Fantasy Society is looking for new members. Interested fans should write Roger Nelson, 4070 Georgia, San Diego 3, Calif.* . . . Mrs. Audrey Angerhofer, Box 454, Millbank, South Dakota would like to buy copies of AS & FA containing the Shaver Mystery . . . *A. J. Offcut, Box 128, Taylorsville, Ky. would like to buy old stf mags and books; would also like to correspond with teen-age fans and hear from anyone in the Louisville-Taylorsville arae interested in forming a club* . . . For Sale: back issuse of aSF, PS, TWS, SS, FA, WT, AS, Super Science, Future Fiction, Marvel Science, Bart House Mystery, Avon Fantasy Reader Pocket Book of Science Fiction, V. I, No. 1 Science Fiction and 300 issues of the old Argosy containing stf and fantasy. Write Peter S. Slusarski, Box 54, Rothschild, Wisc. . . . *Ray Nelson's new address is Century Book Shop, 414 Grand River, Detroit, Mich.* . . . Will Oliver please get in touch with Ellen Kahn, 3946 Legation St., NW, Washington 15, D.C. . . . *John Vollert, A&M College, Okmulgee, Okla. has some stf and fantasy books and mags for sale. Enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing for list* . . . Carl A. Coots, 327 Chemug St., Waverly, N.Y. has 241 issues of AS, aSF, Wonder and others, 1934 to 1943, for sale . . . *Books by E. R. Burroughs and H. Rider Haggard for sale, write Joe Melton, 1061 S. New, Springfield, Mo.* . . . Queens Science Fiction League meets the first Sunday of each month at 31-51 41st, Long Island City, N.Y. with dinner in honor of the guest speaker. Past guests have included Willy Ley, Murray Leinster, Jerome Bixby, Frank Belknap Long and Walter Miller . . . . *David Wilson, 809 N. El Paso, El Paso, Texas will trade or sell copies of FATE; will sell aSF, OW, Imagination, Rosicrucian Digest, Self Realization Mag, Miracle Power, Y.P. and S. & H. Would also like to hear from people interested in flying disks, hypnotism and Yoga* . . . Fans interested in discussing inter-planetary or interstellar travel write Pat Neilson, 22 West St., Albany, N.Y. . . . *Forrest J. Ackerman, 236½ N. New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, Calif. wants copies of The Meteor (organ of The Boys Scientificton Club, c. 1930); stills from any versions of The Golem, Our Heavenly Bodies, Dante's Inferno (Italian), Just Imagine, Siegfried and sequel, Eck, Aelita, Alraune, Mysterious Island; addresses of Sophie Wenzel Ellis, Sean O-Larkin, Francis Stevens, Gertrude Bennett, Patricia Detring-Nathan, Cordwainer Smith, Eleanor McGeary, Andrew Lenard, Howie Low, Robert Wait and Roy Leckrone; copies of Gay Life, Gernsback's Science Fiction Week Poster, Narraciones Terrorificas, Orchideengarten, and large size edition of Metropolis* . . . For sale: a dozen different fanzines for $1; Science-Fantasy No. 1 (Eng. promag), 35c; latest NEW Worlds (Eng.), 35c; Bok Artfolio reduced 1/3 to $1; Tarzan & the Foreign Legion, 50c; list of 1300 fantasy books with descriptive notes, 25c; Extra-Terrestrial Life Gallery, in color, 15c; Bradbury the Baby Killer, 5c. Address Weaver Wright, Box 6151 Metro Stn, Los Angeles 55. . . . *M. McNeil, 2146 Stanmore, Houston, Texas will trade Rhode Island on Lovecraft, F&Stf, Dec '50, Fantasy Reader No. 13, pocket books 1984, Shot in the Dark and Radio Man for aSF Feb. to June and Sept. Will also trade Mislaid Charm for aSF Nov. '49 and FFM Nov. '42.*

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